

A RAND NOTE

**Soviet Concepts and Capabilities for Limited
Nuclear War: What We Know and How We Know It**

Edward L. Warner III

February 1989

RAND

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PREFACE

This Note analyzes the evolution of Soviet concepts of and capabilities for limited nuclear war, Western assessments of these concepts and capabilities, and the basis on which the assessments have been made. It covers the period from 1954, when the Soviets first began to adapt their military strategy to the nuclear age, to the present. A version of this analysis is to be published as a chapter in *Decoding the Enigma: Methodology for the Study of Military Policy*, edited by Cynthia Roberts, Jack Snyder, and Warner Schilling.

During the period in which the author conducted the research for this study, he was simultaneously engaged in related work under the National Security Strategies Program of Project AIR FORCE. While not formally a product of that research, which is being reported in other RAND studies, the present Note relates to portions of it. The study should be of interest to Air Force personnel and other members of the policymaking and intelligence communities concerned with Soviet military strategy, both conventional and nuclear, now and in the near future.

SUMMARY

Soviet doctrinal commentary on nuclear warfare indicates an interest in imposing some limitations on nuclear use for various political and military reasons. The Soviets appear prepared, for example, to carry out nuclear strikes in one region or theater while refraining from nuclear combat in other areas. They have also discussed the possibility of withholding strikes from urban-industrial areas in neighboring countries because they anticipate the conquest of these areas and their possible use for postwar economic exploitation.

Yet the Soviets, for the most part, remain hostile to the idea that a nuclear war could be conducted in a highly limited manner, that is, in the form of a series of small-scale nuclear exchanges carried out largely for bargaining purposes. Their operational doctrine for theater warfare in Europe in particular retains a thinly concealed preemptive predisposition as they remain determined to be the first to launch a large-scale nuclear strike as a means to achieve a potentially decisive military effect.

This Note analyzes apparent Soviet thinking about limited nuclear war over the past three decades, Western assessments of these views, and the basis on which these interpretations have been made. It examines a wide range of factors, including technological opportunities, domestic political considerations, historical tradition, and institutional influences to establish a chronological context in which to interpret doctrinal statements and other evidence.

The extensive Soviet writings on military doctrine, by both military and civilian specialists, constitute the primary source materials for the analysis. In addition, the work draws on a summary of lectures on Soviet nuclear warfare doctrine given at the Voroshilov General Staff Academy in the mid-1970s. Finally, it considers the analyses of U.S. specialists.

In seeking to identify Soviet attitudes toward limited nuclear war, the Note relies not only on what the Soviets have written and trained for, but also their capabilities to mount such operations. It also attempts to distinguish among Soviet views regarding the possibility of mounting limited nuclear attacks designed to (1) encourage reciprocal restraint from the enemy and (2) compel the enemy to capitulate short of total military defeat, rather than simply operational limitations imposed for reasons of greater military efficiency in the context of large-scale attacks.

Between 1954 and 1959, the Soviets acquired their first nuclear weapons for operational use. During most of that period, their arsenal was so small that they planned, in case of war, to conduct their large-scale blitzkrieg offensive against Western Europe with a combination of nuclear and conventional weapons.

Soviet nuclear capabilities grew significantly during the early 1960s, and military spokesmen began to emphasize the role of the nuclear-armed Strategic Rocket Forces (SRF). Soviet doctrine described an all-out global war in which the ballistic missiles of the SRF as well as bombers controlled by Long-Range Aviation, would conduct a series of massed strikes from the outset of hostilities; however, available Soviet doctrinal discussions did not then and to this day still do not distinguish between massed strikes against targets in Western Europe and those against targets in North America. Massed strikes carried out by shorter-range operational and tactical ballistic missiles and fighter-bombers in Europe and Asia would have either accompanied or shortly followed these strategic salvos. Also in the 1960s, the Soviets specifically rejected the Kennedy administration's "flexible response" doctrine, and Marshal V. D. Sokolovskiy himself condemned Secretary of Defense McNamara's "city-sparing" concept.

Sokolovskiy and several other military writers nevertheless began during the 1960s to hint at the possibility of limited theater war. Aware of the destructiveness of nuclear war, the Soviet leaders have appeared inclined to avoid war with the United States altogether, and since the late 1960s, they have been prepared, should war come, to try to contain it below the nuclear level. They have referred to conducting major operations with conventional and, only if necessary, with theater nuclear weapons. During arms control negotiations with U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in summer 1972, Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev even proposed a U.S.-Soviet agreement to eschew nuclear strikes against each other's homeland.¹

Although they have repeatedly criticized U.S. strategies for limited nuclear war, the Soviets are well aware of the various concepts for limitation discussed in Western theoretical literature and embodied in U.S. and NATO military preparations. In 1974, former Secretary of Defense Schlesinger told a congressional committee, apparently based on classified intelligence, that "in their exercises the Soviets have indicated a far greater interest in the notions of controlled nuclear war and nonnuclear war than has ever before been reflected in Soviet doctrine."²

¹See Henry A. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1982, p. 277.

²U.S. Congress, Senate, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, Hearings, 93d Cong., 2d sess., March 14 and April 4, 1974, p. 183.

Since 1975, we have seen little Soviet military writing dealing in any detail with nuclear or conventional war at the intercontinental level. Soviet writers are devoting far more time and space now to the operational art and tactics of theater war. These writings, as well as Western intelligence sources, indicate that the Soviets have developed comprehensive doctrinal concepts, made new organizational arrangements, and improved force capabilities to conduct a large-scale theater offensive in Western Europe, waged solely with conventional weapons. *Zapad-81* was the first large-scale training exercise limited to conventional conflict, without simulated escalation to the nuclear level.

At the same time, Soviet public discussions of the possibility of limited nuclear warfare have been limited to a few references. The Voroshilov Academy lecture materials of the mid-1970s provide a partial exception.³

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the public declarations of top Soviet civilian and military leaders consistently rejected the possibility of a limited nuclear war. They accused the United States of seeking to place itself in a position of being able to initiate a nuclear conflict in Europe that would include strikes against the Soviet Union while the United States would itself be spared. **Since Gorbachev became general secretary, the heavy emphasis on the suicidal dangers of nuclear war has similarly discouraged any Soviet public endorsement of the possibility that a nuclear war, once begun, might be limited.**

Over the past decade, Soviet political and military leaders have emphasized the idea that the Soviet Union is committed to a defensive military doctrine that threatens no one. The major features of this defensive posture include (1) a unilateral Soviet pledge to eschew first use of nuclear weapons; (2) strong support of peace movements opposing U.S. arms programs, in particular, the deployment of the neutron bomb, the Pershing II, and ground-launched cruise missiles in Western Europe; and (3) active sponsorship of increasingly ambitious arms control proposals.

³The U.S. Government recently made selected portions of these materials available to selected specialists. See, for example, Notra Trulock III, "Weapons of Mass Destruction in Soviet Military Strategy," a paper presented at the Joint Conference on Soviet Military Strategy in Europe, Oxfordshire, England, September 24-25, 1984, and Trulock, "Soviet Perspectives on Limited Nuclear Warfare," in Fred S. Hoffman et al., *Swords and Shields: NATO, the USSR, and New Choices for Long-Range Offense and Defense*, Lexington Books, Lexington, Mass., 1987, pp. 53-85. The National Defense University, Washington, D.C., is publishing these materials in an English translation.

Since 1987, we have seen a spate of Soviet commentaries, including several major speeches by Gorbachev, explaining the Soviet aspiration to achieve a state of “reasonable sufficiency” in defense. With regard to nuclear weapons, the sufficiency objectives include an effort to maintain superpower nuclear parity while making deep cuts which are said to be aimed ultimately at the complete elimination of nuclear weapons throughout the world. These commentaries completely reject the idea of fighting a suicidal nuclear war.

This new public stance on the unacceptability of nuclear war has not, however, produced significant change in the operational dimension of Soviet military doctrine. Soviet political leaders continue to call on the Soviet Armed Forces not only to prevent war, but to prepare to fight such a war. With regard to force capabilities, **the Soviets have engaged since 1975 in yet another nuclear force expansion and modernization, as well as a major upgrade of their capabilities for conventional war.** The Kremlin may now have the option to wage nuclear war in Europe in a way that **could decrease the likelihood of Western retaliation against the Soviet homeland.**

In summary, we may draw the following conclusions:

- **Given their large, diverse, and highly capable nuclear strike capabilities, supported by a highly centralized and generally resilient command and control system, the Soviets could—if they chose to—readily employ their nuclear attack forces with various self-imposed constraints.**
- **Despite their strong declaratory stands and doctrinal predilection for massed strikes, the Soviets might be prepared to undertake some limited nuclear operations designed to contain the conflict at less than an all-out, general nuclear war, as long as the Western nuclear powers were prepared to observe similar limits.**
- **Yet the Soviets continue to declare in their political commentaries and writings on operational military doctrine that they are not prepared to engage in highly limited nuclear warfare for symbolic or bargaining purposes in either a theater war or at the intercontinental level.**

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I. INTRODUCTION

Since the Soviet Union began to adapt its military strategy to the nuclear age in the mid-1950s, Western analysts have sought to discern the Soviets' doctrinal preferences for the employment of their nuclear arsenal in the event of war. In light of the development of American concepts, official and unofficial, regarding the possibility that the superpowers might observe certain reciprocal restraints in their use of nuclear weapons, these analysts have been particularly interested in discovering Soviet views regarding limitations on the use of nuclear weapons in war.

This Note analyzes apparent Soviet thinking about limited nuclear war over the past three decades, Western assessments of these views, and the basis on which these interpretations have been made. Before tracing the evolution of Soviet views on limited nuclear warfare, however, it is useful to review the overall approach of this analysis, the various types of evidence that have been used to reach its judgments, and certain definitional problems associated with discussions of "limited" nuclear war.

The Note uses a broad contextual approach involving the examination of a wide range of factors, including technological opportunities, domestic political considerations, historical tradition, and institutional influences to build a chronological context in which to interpret doctrinal statements and other evidence. It also pays close attention to such key concepts as the distinction that the Soviets draw between the military-technical and sociopolitical dimensions of their military doctrine and to the relative authoritativeness of various Soviet sources for the articulation of operational concepts. With regard to authoritativeness, the approach assumes, for example, that the statements of senior military officers that appear in *Voyennaya mysl'* (Military Thought), the restricted-circulation journal published by the General Staff, are a much more reliable guide to Soviet operational concepts for war than the ideological tracts written by military "philosophers" of the Main Political Administration of the Soviet Army and Navy that appear in *Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil'* (Communist of the Armed Forces) or than critiques of U.S. doctrine prepared by civilian specialists working in foreign affairs institutes of the Academy of Sciences.¹

¹In the late 1980s, a small group of civilian specialists began to try to shape Soviet military policy. Their writings have focused on the requirements for nuclear deterrence and said little about the employment of nuclear weapons should war occur.

This approach does not, of course, limit itself to interpretation of declaratory statements and the context in which they appear. It also examines the evolution of the USSR's military capabilities, its organizational arrangements for the employment of its forces and, when available, employment concepts as reflected in Soviet command post and field training exercises.

The extensive Soviet writings on Soviet military doctrine constitute the primary source materials for analyzing Soviet views on limited nuclear operations. This declaratory doctrine is set forth in books and articles appearing in military periodicals authored by Soviet professional military officers. These authors include both senior commanders and a sizable group of specialists, most of whom are colonels and generals holding advanced degrees in military science and associated with the General Staff or the prestigious senior service academies located in Moscow.²

In addition, a few U.S. analysts have recently gained access to a summary of a series of lectures on Soviet doctrine for nuclear warfare that apparently were presented by senior Soviet officers to students attending the Voroshilov Academy of the General Staff in the mid-1970s.³ These materials depict in detail the salient dimensions of a future war and discuss the various operations that the Soviets would have to undertake to win such a conflict.

Western analysts have found references in this voluminous material to the possibility that the Soviets might engage in a limited nuclear war and descriptions of how and why they might observe these limitations. In addition, these analysts have found quotations that appear consistent with the spirit and process of nuclear limitation, although the statements themselves often make no direct reference to such warfare. Finally, some researchers have

²The most famous of these are the prestigious Voroshilov Academy of the General Staff, which falls under the supervision of the chief of the General Staff, and the Frunze Academy, the senior service school run by the Ground Forces. These academies, equivalent to U.S. "war colleges," are institutions attended by the most promising colonels, naval captains, and junior flag rank officers, some of whom are destined to rise to leading posts in the Soviet Armed Forces.

³These materials were initially made accessible by the U.S. Government to selected specialists, including Notra Trulock III and Phillip Petersen. See, for example, Notra Trulock III, "Weapons of Mass Destruction in Soviet Military Strategy," a paper presented at the Joint Conference on Soviet Military Strategy in Europe, Oxfordshire, England, September 24-25, 1984, and Trulock, "Soviet Perspectives on Limited Nuclear Warfare," in Fred S. Hoffman et al., *Swords and Shields: NATO, the USSR, and New Choices for Long-Range Offense and Defense*, Lexington Books, Lexington, Mass., 1987, pp. 53-85. The National Defense University, Washington, D.C., is publishing selected portions of these materials in an English translation.

employed Kremlinological techniques to interpret various claims regarding the capabilities of particular weapons systems or services or alterations in previously standard formulations regarding targeting lists or types of military operations the Soviets say they plan to undertake as evidence of major policy shifts relating to Soviet views on limited nuclear weapons employment.⁴

Many Soviet discussions of Soviet military doctrine also contain descriptions and criticisms of such U.S. military concepts as massive retaliation, flexible response, escalation, and direct confrontation. Some of these critical reviews of U.S. concepts are followed by further commentary on limited nuclear war.

In addition, a small group of military and civilian specialists have written books and articles devoted entirely to the detailed examination of U.S. and allied military concepts.⁵ These descriptions of foreign concepts, as discussed below, are sometimes treated not as sources of insight regarding Soviet views of Western military plans and preferences, about which they are ostensibly written, but rather as surrogates reflecting the predispositions of the Soviets themselves on the matters under discussion.⁶

A third, possible source of insight into Soviet views on limited nuclear war cited by Western analysts is the writings of Soviet military and civilian commentators about the ideology and likely consequences rather than the conduct of nuclear war. This specialized literature on what the Soviets call the sociopolitical dimension of military doctrine is produced largely by military officers holding degrees in philosophical science and affiliated with the Main Political Administration of the Soviet Army and Navy. Some civilian commentators on foreign affairs and arms control matters have expressed views on these questions as well. The use of this material on the ideological character and potential

⁴See Notra Trulock, "Soviet Perspectives on Limited Nuclear Warfare," op. cit.; and Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Selective Nuclear Operations and Soviet Strategy*, The RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif., P-5506, September 1975.

⁵Most of the civilian specialists are connected with either the Institute of the Study of the United States and Canada (IUSAC) or the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), both located in Moscow.

⁶This presumes, of course, that the Soviet specialists who prepare these commentaries on U.S. and NATO doctrine, including civilians such as Henry Trofimenko of IUSAC and Alexei Arbatov of IMEMO, are well informed about Soviet plans and predispositions for the employment of nuclear weapons. Despite the apparent disposition of some of these civilian academics in recent years to influence Soviet defense policy, members of this group continue to deny explicitly having such knowledge of Soviet operational doctrine. And, given the secrecy and security precautions that generally surround Soviet defense matters, their denials are, in my view, likely to be valid.

winnability of nuclear war to identify Soviet operational preferences regarding the conduct of such a war requires considerable ingenuity in interpretation. Moreover, it must also rest on the dubious assumption that these military philosophers and civilian commentators are privy to official Soviet views regarding the operational employment of nuclear weapons.

Other potentially valuable information on Soviet predispositions for the conduct of nuclear warfare comes from the scenarios that the Soviets use in their command post and field training exercises. *Krasnaya zvezda* (Red Star) and periodicals like *Voyenny vestnik* (Military Herald) frequently carry articles describing limited sequences of events in tactical exercises. In addition, in connection with the conduct of large-scale field exercises, the Soviets have often run regular commentaries in the daily press and sometimes published books describing the exercises as a whole after their completion.⁷ These materials provide important evidence regarding (1) Soviet preparations since the mid-1960s for the possibility of waging a large-scale conventional conflict without nuclear weapons and (2) the tactical coordination of various force elements to carry out individual missions.⁸ Unfortunately, they have not yet shed light on Soviet attitudes regarding the limitations that they might observe in the conduct of a nuclear war.

Former Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger indicated that the U.S. intelligence community has apparently gleaned useful information on these questions from classified analyses of Soviet exercise activities. In 1974, he told a congressional committee in an often-cited quote that, "in their exercises the Soviets have indicated far greater interest in the notions of controlled nuclear war and nonnuclear war than has ever before been reflected in Soviet doctrine."⁹ Unfortunately, this rather cryptic observation fails to tell us the kinds of limitations in nuclear employment that were apparently detected. Moreover, we have heard nothing more from U.S. Government spokesmen about Soviet exercise behavior relevant to these matters since 1974.

⁷See Maj. Gen. A. I. Skryl'nik (ed.), "*Zapad-81*" (West-81), Voenizdat, Moscow, 1982.

⁸See, for example, the articles by Lt. Col. Yu. Chumakov, "Swift and Relentless of the Offensive," Maj. Gen. A. Gal'tsev, "Introducing the Second Echelon," and Col. Yu. Kudachkin, "Swift of Action and Defense of Troops," in *Voyenny vestnik*, No. 1, 1983, pp. 22-26, No. 3, 1983, pp. 33-36, and No. 5, 1983, pp. 81-84, respectively.

⁹U.S. Congress, Senate, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, Hearings before the Subcommittee on U.S. Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad and the Subcommittee on Arms Control, International Law and Organization of the Committee on Foreign Relations, 93d Cong., 2d sess., March 14 and April 4, 1974, p. 183.

In seeking to identify Soviet attitudes toward limited nuclear war, we should consider not only what the Soviets have said and apparently trained for in this regard, but also their capabilities to mount such operations. These capabilities include the availability of timely intelligence on the location and status of potential targets, the number and character—accuracy, yield, readiness, and the probability of successful delivery—of their nuclear strike capabilities, and the relative flexibility and survivability of command and control arrangements that they might use to support limited attacks against various enemy targets.

Clearly, Soviet capabilities along all these dimensions have grown significantly over the past three decades. Most observers agree that, by the late 1970s, the Soviets had acquired substantial intelligence, command and control, and strike capabilities at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels—capabilities that could enable them to execute highly controlled, flexible, and diverse nuclear employment options.

Moreover, the procedures and capabilities that the Soviets have developed to enable them to maintain tightly centralized control over the initial launching of a series of massed nuclear strikes—the predominant Soviet pattern of nuclear use discussed in their declaratory doctrine—provide an inherent capability for highly controlled, selective employment at lesser levels as well. Whatever the state of Soviet declaratory doctrine and, for that matter, their contingency planning regarding limited nuclear warfare, these capabilities provide the basis for such limited strikes, be they planned in advance or decided upon in the heat of battle.

II. PROBLEMS OF DEFINITION

In addition to problems of evidence, most Western discussions of Soviet attitudes regarding limited nuclear war have suffered from an absence of clarity regarding just what possible limitations in nuclear use one is seeking to detect. In the most general sense, any option for nuclear warfare that falls deliberately short of the simultaneous use of all available nuclear weapons in an indiscriminate manner against the full range of the enemy's military, political, and economic assets located throughout his territory and other parts of the world reflects some form of conscious "limitation" in nuclear weapons employment.

Even the most bloody-minded Soviet scenario for global nuclear war describing a fight to the death between the socialist and capitalist orders, with each side employing its nuclear arsenal in massed attacks against the full range of the other's targets at the front and deep in the rear in just a few days, falls short of "unlimited" nuclear conflict. For even in this scenario, Soviet military writers have consistently spoken of repeated salvos of nuclear strikes at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels spread over several days and have recognized the need to employ weapons selectively to achieve specific military effects against targets to which they assign high priority. In general, however, the conscious control or limitation of nuclear operations portrayed in Soviet operational doctrine consistently involves large-scale attacks from the outset of hostilities as a means to achieve desired military and political effects.

Western observers studying Soviet attitudes toward limited nuclear conflict have not, in most cases, concerned themselves with operational limitations in the context of large-scale attacks designed simply to facilitate other military operations and to optimize the desired destructive effects of nuclear strikes. Rather, they have largely sought to discover Soviet views regarding the possibility of mounting limited nuclear attacks designed to (1) encourage reciprocal restraint from the enemy and (2) compel the enemy to capitulate short of having been totally defeated militarily.

Limitations imposed in pursuit of these objectives could involve the selection of the types and numbers of nuclear weapons employed, the character of the targets struck, and the geographic areas subjected to attack. Certain limited nuclear employment patterns could, of course, serve all of these purposes—operational utility, damage containment, and coercive bargaining—simultaneously.

Once having established that less than all-out—that is, some form of limited, selective—employment is being considered, it would still be useful to know what types of limitations, particularly with regard to the number of weapons involved, their point of origin, and likely targets, the Soviet military commanders who must carry out and the senior political leaders who must make the ultimate choices about the conduct of Soviet nuclear operations are most likely to contemplate. Consequently, in the discussion that follows, we will seek to identify what types of limitations in nuclear employment, if any, the Soviets are most likely to implement and what appear to be the predominant motivations behind Soviet concepts of limited nuclear use.

III. THE EVOLUTION OF SOVIET VIEWS ON LIMITED NUCLEAR WAR

1954-1959: EMERGING NUCLEAR CAPABILITIES

The Soviets themselves identify the period between 1954 and 1959 as one in which they first began to adapt their thinking to the nuclear age.¹ During this period, they acquired their first nuclear weapons for operational military use and slowly built up their stockpile to some 1000 to 1200 tactical, operational, and longer-range strategic weapons by the end of the decade.² They could deliver these weapons by bombers and first-generation missile systems of various ranges.

Throughout most of this period, their nuclear arsenal was so small that the Soviets had no alternative but to plan to carry out their large-scale blitzkrieg offensive into Western Europe, modeled on the successful operations against Nazi Germany and Japan in 1944-1945, with a combination of nuclear and conventional firepower. Soviet military writings indicated that, had nuclear weapons been available and employed, the highest priority strikes would have been undertaken in a series of massed attacks.

Shorter-range nuclear delivery systems—fighter-bombers and operational-tactical missiles—would have been used to execute strikes throughout the depth of the enemy's defense in theaters of military operations directly adjacent to Soviet forces as a prelude to a massive ground offensive designed to seize and occupy enemy territory. The longer-range systems, largely the medium and heavy bombers of Long-Range Aviation, would have attacked repeatedly in the enemy's deep rear to destroy his military capabilities, especially his nuclear-armed forces, and to disrupt his economy.³

¹Col. Gen. M. Cherednichenko, "On the Features of the Development of Military Art in the Postwar Period," *Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal* (Military History Journal), hereafter cited as *VIZh*, No. 6, 1970, pp. 19-30.

²Stephen M. Meyer, *Soviet Theater Nuclear Forces, Part 2: Capabilities and Implications*, Adelphi Papers, No. 187, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 1984, p. 9. Much of the capabilities data in this paper are derived from Meyer's superb work, which not only traces the evolution of Soviet theater nuclear force posture but also provides pioneering analysis of the likely effectiveness of the Soviet nuclear arsenal over time, when applied against NATO's evolving target array.

³Lt. Gen. S. N. Krasil'nikov, "On Questions about the Character of Modern War," in *Marksizm-leninizm o voine i armii* (Marxism-Leninism on War and the Army), Voenizdat, Moscow, 1956, pp. 156-161. For the best Western accounts of Soviet strategy during this period, see Raymond L. Garthoff, *Soviet Strategy in the Nuclear Age* (rev. ed.), Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1962, passim, and Herbert S. Dinerstein, *War and the Soviet Union* (rev. ed.), Frederick A. Praeger, New York, 1962.

Soviet military writings treated nuclear weapons, for the most part, as a new, more powerful means of firepower, which by themselves would not decisively affect the outcome of a war. The limited arsenal of Soviet nuclear weapons was to be employed promptly and concentratedly from the outset of a major conflict in combination with other conventional firepower to achieve maximum military effect.

At the same time, the great emphasis that the Soviets placed on the role of surprise and preemption in the emerging nuclear age reflected their awareness of the potentially revolutionary import of nuclear weapons on military strategy. During the mid-1950s, Soviet military theorists wrote openly about the desirability of preventing a successful surprise attack by preparing the Soviet Armed Forces to beat the enemy to the punch with “preemptive surprise blows of terrible destructive force.”⁴ Following the publication in the United States of an article calling attention to these Soviet preemptive inclinations in 1958, a prominent Soviet strategist vigorously denied any interest in a preemptive strategy.⁵ In the wake of that exchange, the Soviets generally avoided explicit public discussions of their possible interest in preemption, particularly at the strategic level, while continuing to emphasize the utility of surprise, a practice they have continued up to the present day.

During the mid-1950s the Soviets displayed no interest in the possibility of imposing special limitations on the conduct of nuclear attacks. The primary limitations would have resulted from the pronounced scarcity of weapons available relative to the targets that Soviet doctrine called for strikes against, both throughout the regional theaters around the periphery of the USSR and in the United States.

On several occasions senior civilian leaders, including Khrushchev and Malenkov, as well as military spokesmen, expressly rejected the possibility of intentionally keeping a war in Europe within certain low-level tactical nuclear bounds; they argued that such uses would inevitably cause extensive casualties and would very rapidly trigger massed nuclear use by both sides.⁶ Given the pronounced U.S. advantage in nuclear capabilities and the signs of

⁴Marshal of Tank Troops P. Rotmistrov, “On the Role of Surprise in Contemporary War,” *Voyennaya mysl'* (Military Thought), hereafter cited as *VM*, No. 2, 1955, p. 20, cited in Dinerstein, *War and the Soviet Union*, p. 187.

⁵This exchange in which Herbert Dinerstein published the article cited in *Foreign Affairs*, January 1958, and Army Gen. V. Kurasov responded in *Krasnaya zvezda* (Red Star), hereafter cited as *KZ*, April 27, 1958, is described in Dinerstein, *War and the Soviet Union*, pp. 188-189, 209-211.

⁶See Garthoff, *Soviet Strategy in the Nuclear Age*, pp. 107-112.

interest among American theorists at that time in a nuclear war limited to the use of tactical weapons in the European theater, the Soviets not surprisingly sought to deter any U.S. move to exploit its superior nuclear capabilities by emphasizing the likelihood that any nuclear use whatsoever would lead to global nuclear war.

Had nuclear conflict occurred in Europe during the 1950s, Raymond Garthoff and Stephen Meyer have suggested that the Soviets might well have planned to avoid carrying out nuclear strikes against enemy economic-industrial complexes—strikes called for by their doctrine—when these complexes were located within reach of Soviet ground forces.⁷ This restraint would have been imposed, they speculate, in the expectation that Soviet troops would be able to capture these areas and thus allow the Soviet Union to utilize the industrial facilities for their own benefit.

Such Soviet nuclear “city-sparing” in the Federal Republic of Germany, for example, would have been particularly logical, and the possibility that the Soviets might have contemplated such restraint is increased by the overabundance of potential Western targets in relation to the modest Soviet nuclear arsenal. Nevertheless, we have little evidence to support Soviet interest in this approach, at least during that period. As best I can determine, the evidence amounts to no more than the strong Soviet emphasis on countermilitary targeting, combined with a single article that appeared in the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* in 1956 suggesting that key “strategic objectives,” including industrial centers and economic regions, could be forcibly seized without reference to their being bombed as well.⁸

1960-1965: THE NUCLEAR REVOLUTION

Soviet nuclear capabilities grew significantly in the early 1960s. Under substantial pressure from Nikita Khrushchev, the dominant Party leader, the Soviet military entered a turbulent period in which they made major adjustments in their military strategy.⁹ In the context of what their military writers called the revolution in military affairs, the Soviets greatly increased their emphasis on the role of nuclear-armed missile forces, particularly

⁷Ibid., pp. 71-75; Stephen M. Meyer, *Soviet Theater Nuclear Forces*, Part 1: *Development of Doctrine and Objectives*, Adelphi Papers, No. 187, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 1984, pp. 10-13.

⁸Garthoff, *Soviet Strategy in the Nuclear Age*, p. 73.

⁹Khrushchev never succeeded in gaining full acceptance of his more radical views that would have oriented Soviet defense policy almost solely toward nuclear-armed missiles and cut back heavily the size of the ground forces, the surface navy, and the manned bomber force. For the best treatment of this period, see Thomas W. Wolfe, *Soviet Strategy at the Crossroads*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1965.

those operated by the newly formed Strategic Rocket Forces (SRF). The troops of the SRF manned the early-generation, central strategic intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) targeted largely against the United States, as well as the intermediate- and medium-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs and MRBMs) covering theater targets in Europe, North Africa, and the Far East.

The predominant Soviet doctrinal scenario described a world war between the opposing social systems in which a series of massed strikes would be conducted from the outset of hostilities during what was called the critical initial period of war. The regional and intercontinental range ballistic missiles of the SRF, the medium and heavy bombers of Long-Range Aviation, and the handful of submarines carrying ballistic missiles were to carry out these strikes.

The strikes would cover the full range of enemy military, economic, and political targets in the near regions of the contiguous theaters of military operations and throughout the enemy's deep rear. The Soviets assigned the highest priority in both of these arenas to strikes on the enemy's military capabilities, particularly those associated with the conduct of nuclear operations. Yet, most doctrinal writings also called for simultaneous massed attacks throughout the depth of enemy territory designed to devastate his political-administrative infrastructure and general economic system, thus breaking the enemy's will and destroying his overall capacity to resist.¹⁰

Soviet military writings have not, it is important to note, set forth a distinctive body of concepts describing how the Soviet Union might conduct an intercontinental nuclear war with the United States. Soviet doctrinal writings on the geographic focus of military operations do not differentiate between strikes against targets in Europe and other regional theaters and strikes against targets in North America. They distinguish instead among nuclear strikes conducted against targets in three areas:

¹⁰The clearest expression of this is found in a passage that appeared in all three editions of Marshal Sokolovskiy's *Military Strategy*. Responding to their own rhetorical question whether "the defeat of the enemy's armed forces or the annihilation and devastation of targets in the deep rear in order to break up the organization of the country" should be the main strategic goal of a war, the authors stated: "Soviet military strategy gives the following answer to this question: both these goals should be achieved simultaneously. The annihilation of the enemy's armed forces, the destruction of targets deep in his territory and the disorganization of the country will be a single continuous process of the war." Marshal V. D. Sokolovskiy (ed.), *Voyennaya strategiya* (Military Strategy), 3d edition, revised and expanded, Voenizdat, Moscow, 1968, p. 244.

- Those carried out to support the combined-arms, air-land offensive in nearby theaters by destroying targets in the immediate battle area and in the adjacent operational rear of enemy forces fighting in continental theaters of military operations immediately adjacent to the USSR and in Eastern Europe
- Those associated with a war at sea in oceanic and maritime theaters of military operations
- Those carried out against targets in the enemy's "deep strategic rear."

In a major war waged against the United States and its Western European allies, the deep strategic rear would appear to encompass both the western portions of the NATO alliance in Europe, i.e., the westernmost parts of the Federal Republic of Germany, France, the Low Countries, the United Kingdom, Spain, and Portugal, and the territory of the United States.¹¹ Consequently, a mix of regional strategic systems—MRBMs and IRBMs, medium bombers, and missiles carried on submarines patrolling within range of Western Europe—and intercontinental strategic systems—ICBMs, heavy bombers, and strategic submarines whose missiles could reach U.S. territory—would strike NATO's deep rear. This aggregated treatment of NATO's deep strategic rear prevents us from identifying Soviet targeting or conflict-limiting strategies for operations carried out in Europe as differentiated from those directed against the United States.

During the early 1960s, Soviet doctrinal discussions focused almost exclusively on global nuclear war. Soviet military and civilian commentators, including Khrushchev, consistently emphasized the idea that any armed conflict involving the Soviet Union and the United States, even one that might begin with conventional weapons as a local war of limited geographic scope, would almost "inevitably" escalate to a full-scale, worldwide nuclear war within a matter of hours. They were particularly adamant regarding the likelihood of rapid escalation to all-out nuclear conflict if war were to occur in the vital European theater.

Soviet military doctrine of the early 1960s continued to largely reject the possibility of limited nuclear war. As noted above, the vast majority of Soviet writings dealt with global nuclear war involving massed nuclear strikes at the front and throughout the "operational" and "deep" rear areas from the outset of hostilities and extensive land-air offensive operations into adjacent theaters designed to exploit these strikes.

¹¹Meyer describes a geographic division along roughly comparable lines in *Soviet Theater Nuclear Forces*, Part 1, p. 11.

Soviet military and civilian commentators explicitly rejected the Kennedy administration's new "flexible response" concept, with its assumptions that wars might be limited to conventional conflict. The collective military authors of the first and second editions of the landmark volume *Military Strategy*, published in 1962 and 1963, for example, described the flexible-response strategy in some detail, condemned it, and cited several reasons to support their conclusion that a major war would quickly involve large numbers of nuclear weapons that could not be contained.¹²

The Soviets also directly rejected Defense Secretary Robert McNamara's so-called city-sparing initiative. They took note of McNamara's commencement address at Ann Arbor in June 1962, in which he suggested that the United States might seek to limit damage in a nuclear war by intentionally confining itself to attacking the enemy's military forces while avoiding strikes on his major urban-industrial concentrations in hopes of eliciting similar restraint from the enemy. Within a few days, Marshal V. D. Sokolovskiy, a leading military theorist and former chief of the General Staff, published a rejoinder in *Krasnaya zvezda* that expressly rejected and condemned the McNamara strategy as simply the latest provocative U.S. effort to develop rules to legitimize the conduct of nuclear war.¹³

Despite their emphasis on nuclear escalation and repeated criticisms of the American flexible-response strategy, the Soviets began to write with increasing frequency about the necessity of preparing for nonnuclear conflict. Even in the midst of the "nuclear revolution," Soviet doctrine had never dropped the requirement for conducting large-scale operations supported by conventional firepower. Such operations were judged likely to occur both in mop-up operations following large-scale nuclear strikes and on axes of attack or in theaters of military operations where nuclear weapons were not available.¹⁴ Nevertheless, by the mid- to late-1960s, Soviet military writings indicated that they had begun to contemplate the possibility that even a major NATO-Warsaw Pact war in Europe might open with a brief period of purely conventional combat, albeit under the constant threat of rapid escalation to all-out nuclear war.

¹²For these sections of both editions, see Harriet Fast Scott's annotated translation of the Sokolovskiy volume, *Soviet Military Strategy*, edited with an analysis and commentary by H. F. Scott, Macdonald and Jane's, London, 1975, pp. 56-58, 389-396.

¹³Marshal V. D. Sokolovskiy, "A Suicidal Strategy," *KZ*, July 16, 1962.

¹⁴See Col. M. Fedulov, "Problems of Modern Combined Arms Combat," *VM*, No. 10, 1964, pp. 28-37.

Although the preponderance of Soviet doctrinal discussion was strongly negative on the possibility of substantially limited nuclear conflict, there were a few hints that the Soviets might, nevertheless, be prepared to entertain even this possibility. The second edition of *Military Strategy*, published in 1963, contained this conditional endorsement of at least a transitory period of limited nuclear war:

It may also happen, that in the course of a local war, the sides will employ operational-tactical weapons without employing strategic nuclear weapons. This will change sharply the methods of combat operations and will give them great dynamism and decisiveness. However, war will hardly be waged for a long time with employment of operational-tactical nuclear weapons alone. Once matters reach the use of nuclear weapons, the sides will be forced to put into operation their entire nuclear strength. Local war will turn into world nuclear war.¹⁵

Other military writers, such as Army Gen. S. M. Shtemenko and Maj. Gen. N. A. Lomov, stated that Soviet military doctrine did not exclude the possibility of limited war in the theater and that the Soviet Armed Forces must therefore be prepared to conduct wars waged solely with tactical nuclear weapons, although the likelihood of escalation to all-out nuclear war would be great.¹⁶

The Soviets substantially improved their nuclear capabilities during the first half of the 1960s as follows:

- Expanded their regional strategic forces dramatically with the addition of some 700 second-generation, land-based, medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles to the already large and still growing medium-range bomber force¹⁷

¹⁵Sokolovskiy (ed.), *Military Strategy*, 2d edition, H. F. Scott translation, p. 453. Intriguingly, this suggestion that theater nuclear war might be limited, at least initially, was dropped from the third edition of *Military Strategy*, published in 1968, at a time when similar views were being expressed in the pages of *VM*, as discussed below.

¹⁶Army Gen. S. M. Shtemenko, "The Queen of the Battlefield Loses Her Crown," *Nedelya* (The Week), No. 6, January 31-February 6, 1965; Shtemenko, "Infantry Is Motor, Armor and Wings," *Sovetskaya Rossiya* (Soviet Russia), November 27, 1965; Maj. Gen. N. A. Lomov, "The Influence of Soviet Military Doctrine on the Development of the Armed Forces," *Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil* (Communist of the Armed Forces), hereafter cited as *KVS*, No. 21, 1965, p. 18.

¹⁷Meyer, *Soviet Theater Nuclear Forces*, Part 2.

- Deployed a small number of submarines armed with surface- and subsurface-launched ballistic missiles of modest range that could have been employed in regional theaters or against the United States, depending on their location
- Built up their capabilities for nuclear operations in direct support of the ground offensive with the deployment of new nuclear-capable fighter-bombers, improved surface-to-surface operational and tactical range missile systems, and a new family of nuclear weapons with decreased yields, thus providing an improved capability to limit collateral damage.¹⁸

The increase in Soviet intercontinental delivery capability was only slightly less dramatic. It included the deployment of some 300 first-, second-, and early third-generation ICBMs in the late 1950s and early 1960s to supplement the modest heavy bomber capability deployed in the mid-1950s. These new, more survivable, ready, and capable intercontinental and theater systems were backed by improved command and control arrangements and supported by a greatly expanded nuclear weapons arsenal. The resultant force, when brought to full combat readiness, put substantial muscle behind Soviet war-fighting doctrine. From all doctrinal indications, these forces were intended for use in a series of massed strikes launched over many days to wage a global nuclear war; there is no reason to believe, from a capabilities standpoint, however, they could have been employed as well in a much more limited, controlled manner.

The 1960s also produced heated exchanges among Soviet specialists on two different occasions regarding the winnability of nuclear war. The writings of Maj. Gen. (Ret.) N. A. Talenskiy,¹⁹ the former editor of *Military Thought* and a frequent commentator on strategic and foreign policy matters during the latter Khrushchev period, and of N. M. Nikol'skiy²⁰ and A. I. Krylov,²¹ civilian specialists on foreign policy and arms control, all suggesting that a world nuclear war would lead to the death of human civilization, sparked spirited

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Maj. Gen. (Ret.) N. A. Talenskiy, "Reflections on the Last War," *International Affairs*, No. 5, 1965, p. 23.

²⁰N. M. Nikol'skiy, *Osnovnoy vopros sovremennosti* (The Basic Problem of Modernity), Mezhdunarodnyye otnosheniya Publishers, Moscow, 1964, pp. 356-381.

²¹A. I. Krylov, "October and the Strategy of Peace," *Voprosy filosofii* (Problems of Philosophy), No. 3, 1968, pp. 5-7.

rejoinders from the Soviet military, in particular from the military philosophers of the Main Political Administration.²²

At a period when Soviet military scientists, planners, and commanders were working diligently to prepare the Soviet Armed Forces to fight and win a large-scale nuclear war, these three were strongly taken to task for suggesting that a nuclear war could have no victors. According to their military critics, such theorizing was not only ideologically incorrect—socialism is historically destined to triumph over capitalism—but also harmful. The strongest critique warned that “any *a priori* rejection of the possibility of victory is harmful because it leads to morale disarmament, to a disbelief in victory and to fatalism and passivity.”²³

James M. McConnell, who reviewed these exchanges in great detail, concluded that they represented a significant, albeit indirectly conducted, debate regarding the relative emphasis to be placed on nuclear, as opposed to conventional, warfare in Soviet military doctrine.²⁴ In my view, the issues were quite different. The military ideologists of the Main Political Administration were simply meeting their institutional responsibilities, which included the reaffirmation of the invincibility of socialism and the preparation of Soviet servicemen to fight and win a nuclear war, when they vigorously rebutted those misguided citizens who were echoing the defeatist argument, often heard in the West, that nuclear war was unwinnable.²⁵

I do not intend to imply, of course, that Soviet political and military leaders do not appreciate fully the fact that a nuclear war would contain grave dangers for the Soviet Union. By all indications, the Soviets who have addressed the problem, both military and

²²The initial attack was made by Lt. Col. Ye. Rybkin, “On the Essence of World Missile-Nuclear War,” *KVS*, No. 17, 1965, pp. 50-56, and followed up by Col. I. Grudinin, “Theory, Politics, Ideology: On the Essence of War,” *KZ*, January 24, 1967. The military criticism of Krylov was made by Maj. Gen. K. Bochkarev, “The Question of the Sociological Aspect of the Struggle Against the Forces of Aggression and War,” *VM*, No. 9, 1968, pp. 3-16. For another discussion of these episodes, see Raymond L. Garthoff, “Mutual Deterrence and Strategic Arms Limitation in Soviet Policy,” *Strategic Review*, Fall 1982, pp. 36-42.

²³Rybkin, “On the Essence of World Missile-Nuclear War,” p. 56.

²⁴James M. McConnell, *The Soviet Shift in Emphasis from Nuclear to Conventional: The Long Term Perspective*, Center for Naval Analyses, Washington, D.C., CRC 490, Vol. I, June 1983, pp. 5-8.

²⁵Moreover, as suggested earlier, it is extremely doubtful that these particular military officers were well informed about the operational dimensions of Soviet military doctrine.

civilian, have long been aware of the enormous destructiveness of nuclear war. To the extent that this awareness is deeply felt, Soviet leaders are likely to seek to avoid war with the United States altogether or, if war occurs, since the late 1960s they have been prepared to try to contain it at less than the nuclear level. Having said this, I am still not convinced that the two major exchanges on this question that occurred in the 1960s or the exchange that took place in 1973-1974 were directly related to the development of Soviet doctrinal concepts or operational military preparations of those periods for the conduct of nuclear warfare.²⁶

1966-1974: CONTINUING EVOLUTION

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, Soviet military writings generally continued to develop along the lines laid out in the previous period. The major discussion was centered on how to carry out the various operations called for in the conduct of a general nuclear war.²⁷ Military scientists continued to elaborate on the roles of the services independently and in combination in conducting both the “massed” salvos and the subsequent “group” and “individual” nuclear strikes against the enemy coalition throughout its operational and strategic depth.²⁸ Yet at the same time, as described below, there were several discussions of the possible conduct of limited nuclear operations.

²⁶The successor round of attacks in 1973-1974 found military philosophers Maj. Gen. Milovidov, Rear Adm. V. Shelyag, Col. T. Kondratkov, Col. I. Sidel'nikov, and Col. Ye. Rybkin criticizing the likes of G. A. Arbatov, A. Bovin, V. G. Dolgin, and others for their “mathematic approaches” and “defeatism” regarding the likely consequences of a global nuclear war. For a fuller discussion of this incident, see Edward L. Warner III, *The Military in Contemporary Soviet Politics: An Institutional Analysis*, Praeger, New York, 1976, pp. 252-254. McConnell has a very different view that connects the military authors' views with a shift toward a Soviet city-sparing, counterforce-only option for intercontinental nuclear war. See McConnell, *The Soviet Shift in Emphasis . . .*, pp. 10-13.

²⁷See Col. A. A. Sidorenko, *Nastupleniye* (The Offensive), Voenizdat, Moscow, 1970, translated and published under the auspices of the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1974; Maj. Gen. Kh. Dzhelaukov, “The Infliction of Deep Strikes,” *VM*, No. 2, 1966; Marshal of Aviation S. Krasovskiy, “Trends in the Use of Aircraft in Nuclear War,” *VM*, No. 3, 1967; and Maj. Gen. N. Vasendin and Col. N. Kuznetsov, “Modern Warfare and Surprise Attack,” *VM*, No. 6, 1968, all translated and reprinted in Joseph D. Douglass, Jr., and Amoretta M. Hoeber (eds.), *Selected Readings from Military Thought, 1963-1973* (hereafter cited as *Selected Readings*), Part 1, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1982, pp. 106-115, 152-160, and 226-233.

²⁸Sidorenko, *The Offensive*, pp. 109-137, and Maj. Gen. V. M. Zemskov, “Characteristic Features of Modern Wars and Possible Methods of Conducting Them,” *VM*, No. 7, 1969, in Douglass and Hoeber (eds.), *Selected Readings*, Part 2, p. 50.

During this period, Admiral Gorshkov, the commander in chief of the Soviet Navy, boasted about the superior survivability of missile-carrying submarines over silo-based ballistic missiles.²⁹ This capability suggests that some portion of the strategic submarine force might be destined to be withheld from the initial strategic strikes for use in subsequent operations. This chain of reasoning, combined with tenuous evidence suggesting shifting target assignments for the Strategic Rocket Forces and the strategic submarine force, does not appear sufficient, however, to serve as the basis for McConnell's conclusion that the 1971-1975 period produced a major new Soviet doctrinal innovation called "intercontinental counterforce." According to McConnell, this concept involved plans to employ only the SRF in initial massed strikes against military (counterforce) targets in the United States while the entire Soviet nuclear-powered ballistic-missile submarine (SSBN) force, targeted against U.S. cities, was to be withheld as a sea-based reserve.³⁰

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, several military authors also described the manner in which Soviet ground and air forces were to be employed to exploit the initial nuclear strikes in the course of the theater offensive to defeat the enemy and seize and occupy his territory.³¹ Although the Soviets generally avoided any open references to preemption, particularly at the strategic level, the preemptive spirit remained clearly evident. Soviet military and civilian spokesmen repeatedly spoke publicly about a Soviet commitment to maintain combat-ready forces prepared to "seize the strategic initiative" so as to "frustrate" or "break up" enemy attacks with "timely blows" against his nuclear delivery systems.³²

²⁹Adm. S. G. Gorshkov, "Navies in War and Peace," *Morskoy sbornik* (Naval Digest), No. 2, February 1973, p. 21. For a similar view from a presumably less biased observer, see Marshal A. A. Grechko, *Vooruzhennyye sily sovetskogo gosudarstva* (The Armed Forces of the Soviet State), Voenizdat, Moscow, 1975, translated and published under the auspices of the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1976, p. 153.

³⁰James M. McConnell, *The Soviet Shift in Emphasis from Nuclear to Conventional: The Mid-Term Perspective*, Center for Naval Analyses, Washington, D.C., CRC 490, Vol. II, June 1983, pp. 11-16.

³¹See Sidorenko, *The Offensive*, passim; Maj. Gen. Yu. Z. Novikov and Col. F. D. Sverdlov, *Manevr v obshchevoyskovom boyu* (Maneuver in Combined Arms Battle), Voenizdat, Moscow, 1967, passim; Col. M. Skovorodkin, "Some Questions on Coordination of Branches of Armed Forces in Major Operations," *VM*, No. 2, 1967, in Douglass and Hoerber (eds.), *Selected Readings*, Part 1, pp. 141-151.

³²Among the many Soviet discussions of "timely blows" to "frustrate" an enemy nuclear attack, see Maj. Gen. Kh. Dzhelaukov, "Augmentation of Strategic Efforts in Modern Armed Conflict," *VM*, No. 1, 1964, and Vasendin and Kuznetsov, "Modern Warfare and Surprise Attack," *VM*, No. 6, 1968, in Douglass and Hoerber (eds.), *Selected Readings*, Part 1, pp. 35-36, 231, and Marshal A. A. Grechko, *Na strazhe mira i stroitel'stva kommunizma* (On Guard for Peace and the Building of Communism), Voenizdat, Moscow, 1971, p. 64.

Soviet writing on operational doctrine up to the present retains this thinly concealed preemptive predisposition. In combination with the strong Soviet emphasis on carrying out massed initial nuclear strikes for maximum military and political effect, it represented and still represents a major obstacle to any Soviet adoption of strategies calling for crossing the nuclear threshold with the controlled initiation of a very few nuclear strikes against selected targets for purposes of exerting coercive pressure, political symbolism, or tacit bargaining. It could, however, support massed strikes by the Soviets focused on a particular theater while they refrained from employing nuclear weapons in other theaters.

The signs of Soviet interest in the possibility of an opening conventional phase of theater conflict in Europe, fought under the constant threat of rapid, perhaps preemptive, nuclear escalation, became much more pronounced in the latter half of the 1960s. Senior military commanders and military scientists spoke often of the need for the Soviet Armed Forces to be prepared to conduct major operations with nuclear and conventional weapons and with conventional weapons alone.³³ Others explored the ways to accomplish the initial breakthrough assaults with conventional fire support.

The earlier emphasis on the inevitability of escalation of a conflict between the superpowers gave way to judgments that such conflicts would probably escalate or were “fraught with great danger” of expansion into general nuclear war. Major Soviet and Warsaw Pact training exercises were modified to include an opening conventional phase prior to their simulated expansion to general nuclear war.³⁴ The Soviets also rediscovered the large-scale “independent air operation” of World War II vintage, apparently viewing it as a major means to bring conventional firepower to bear in adjacent theaters in the event that nuclear weapons were not to be employed.³⁵ By all indications, however, the Soviets

³³See Marshal I. I. Yakubovskiy, “Ground Forces,” *KZ*, July 21, 1967; Col. B. Samorukov, “Combat Operations Involving Conventional Means of Destruction,” *VM*, No. 8, 1967, and Maj. Gen. S. Shtrik, “The Encirclement and Destruction of the Enemy During Combat Operations Not Involving the Use of Nuclear Weapons,” *VM*, No. 1, 1968, in Douglass and Hoerber (eds.), *Selected Readings*, Part 1, pp. 173, 187, 190; Lt. Gen. I. Zavyalov, “New Weapons and the Art of War,” *KZ*, October 30, 1970; Lt. Gen. V. Reznichenko, “Tactics—A Component of the Art of War,” *VM*, No. 12, 1973, in Federal Broadcast Information Service, FBIS FPD 0048, 20 August 1974, p. 43.

³⁴Thomas W. Wolfe, *Soviet Power in Europe, 1945-1970*, Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1970, pp. 477-482.

³⁵Yu. Bryukhanov, “The Massed Employment of Aircraft,” *VM*, No. 6, 1969, pp. 40-49; Marshal of Aviation P. S. Kutakhov, “The Conduct of Air Operations,” *VIZh*, No. 6, 1972, pp. 20-28.

believed this period of conventional conflict was likely to last only a few days before escalating into all-out, global nuclear war.

Many Soviet military writings remained negative on the possibilities of limited nuclear war. Not only Soviet experts reviewing Western military doctrine, but also military specialists elaborating the Soviets' own doctrinal concepts consistently criticized the U.S. "graduated deterrence-flexible response" policy as totally impractical. Soviet discussions of modern operations continued to emphasize the conduct of large-scale, massed attacks undertaken from the very first minutes that nuclear weapons were employed as the most effective means to fight and win a nuclear war.

Nevertheless, from the mid-1960s through the early 1970s, several Soviet military writers asserted that limitations in nuclear employment might be observed in a nuclear war. A brief discussion of the potential parameters for limitation was provided by Colonel M. V. Popov, a military philosopher associated with the Main Political Administration's Lenin Political Military Academy, writing about the "laws" of warfare derived by the application of Marxist-Leninist philosophy to contemporary military affairs. According to Popov:

Whether war will acquire the character of an unlimited thermonuclear war or whether it will envelop only certain regions with the employment of weapons of limited yield will, to a considerable extent, be predetermined by the disposition of class and political forces in the international arena.³⁶

Colonel Popov speculated further that if nuclear use was, in fact, limited, it might involve limitations "in terms of the quantity and yield of the nuclear strikes and also with regard to definite regions of the world."³⁷ Notra Trulock argues that Popov's interest in limited nuclear warfare was further underscored by his failure to include any mention of the inevitable escalation of such conflict to general nuclear war.³⁸ Popov's familiarity with Soviet military-technical (operational) doctrine during this period is highly suspect, given his specialization in Marxist-Leninist philosophy. Moreover, Popov's very brief discussion of

³⁶Col. M. V. Popov, "The Laws of Armed Conflict and Principles of Military Art," in Col. N. Ya. Sushko and Col. T. R. Kondratkov (eds.), *Metodologicheskiye problemy voyennoy teorii i praktiki* (Methodological Problems of Military Theory and Practice), Voenizdat, Moscow, 1966, p. 108.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Notra Trulock III, "Soviet Perspectives on Limited Nuclear Warfare," in Fred S. Hoffman et al., *Swords and Shields: NATO, the USSR, and New Choices for Long-Range Offense and Defense*, Lexington Books, Lexington, Mass., 1987, pp. 53-85.

limited nuclear war was omitted from the revised edition of this Soviet work as published in 1969.³⁹

The works of several other Soviet military scientists who were likely to be better informed about Soviet operational doctrine included passages suggesting that the Soviet Union might become involved in a limited nuclear conflict, at least for a brief period. The most explicit discussions of potential limitations on Soviet nuclear weapons employment were provided by Col. M. F. Shirokov who, as described below, also wrote in this time frame about the value of selective nuclear targeting as a means to avoid the destruction of key industrial centers. Writing in *Military Thought* in 1968, Shirokov stated:

Historical experience shows that political motives can force the abandonment of strikes against extremely important economic and military targets or their implementation with smaller forces and means on a selective basis. In a number of cases it is possible that attacks will even be made against objectives which are not of great military or economic importance, but which are advantageous from a political viewpoint. . . . At present political conditions will be considered when selecting regions for delivering nuclear strikes on a country-wide scale, when determining the number of objectives, and the degree of their destruction of industrial, administrative-political and other centers.⁴⁰

Other, more senior figures referred briefly to the possibility of limited nuclear warfare. Marshal V. D. Sokolovskiy and Maj. Gen. M. Cherednichenko, also writing in *Military Thought*, noted in 1968 that “the possibility is not excluded of wars occurring with the use of conventional means as well as the limited use of nuclear means in one or several theaters of military operations.”⁴¹ Several months later, Army Gen. S. Ivanov, after criticizing the U.S. concept of limited nuclear war as an attempt to conduct nuclear war in distant theaters while sparing its own territory, wrote:

³⁹Col. Gen. A. S. Zheltov (ed.), *Metodologicheskiye problemy voyennoy teorii i praktiki* (Methodological Problems of Military Theory and Practice), Voenizdat, Moscow, 1969.

⁴⁰Col. M. F. Shirokov, “The Question of Influences in the Military and Economic Potential of Warring States,” *VM*, No. 4, 1968, in Douglass and Hoeber (eds.), *Selected Readings*, Part 1, pp. 216-217.

⁴¹Marshal V. D. Sokolovskiy and Maj. Gen. M. Cherednichenko, “Military Strategy and Its Problems,” *VM*, No. 10, 1968, in Douglass and Hoeber (eds.), *Selected Readings*, Part 2, p. 9.

Of course, theoretically it can be assumed that for the purpose of scaring one another the belligerents will limit themselves to inflicting some selected nuclear attacks on secondary objectives, but will not dare to expand the nuclear conflict any further, but such an exchange of individual nuclear attacks, even if it should take place, cannot characterize the war in its entirety.⁴²

At the same time, Maj. Gen. V. Zemskov, after discussing the American concepts of flexible response and escalation, observed:

*A nuclear attack with limited goals is specified by the NATO leadership as one of the variants for unleashing a war in secondary theaters of military operations, but it is not excluded even in Europe. True in the latter case it is hardly probable that military operations will succeed for any length of time in staying within a limited framework. Most likely they will grow into a general nuclear war.*⁴³

In a second article in *Military Thought* published just two months later, Zemskov described at length NATO's theory of what he called "war by stages." He said that NATO was preparing for a war that would likely begin with conventional conflict, then be followed by the limited use of tactical nuclear weapons (which, he wrote, he strongly doubted could be kept limited), and finally the widespread use of strategic nuclear means. He concluded his discussion of "war by stages" with the following observation:

*If such a war occurs, a constant increase in strategic pressure and multiple changes in the nature, scale, and methods of military operations will be characteristic of it. Its culminating point will coincide with the moment of transfer to the mass use of strategic nuclear weapons. In light of this, a "war by stages" constitutes a variant of general nuclear war.*⁴⁴

In February 1970, Maj. Gen. Cherednichenko provided a seminal discussion of limited nuclear warfare in the pages of *Military Thought*. After noting that owing to

⁴²Army Gen. S. Ivanov, "Soviet Military Doctrine and Strategy," *VM*, No. 5, 1969, in Douglass and Hoerber (eds.), *Selected Readings*, Part 2, p. 29.

⁴³Maj. Gen. V. Zemskov, "Wars of the Modern Era," *VM*, No. 5, 1969, in Douglass and Hoerber (eds.) *Selected Readings*, Part 2, p. 43 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁴Zemskov, "Characteristic Features of Modern War and Possible Methods of Conducting Them," *ibid.*, p. 51.

advances in Soviet strategic capabilities, the United States had been forced to develop concepts for limited nuclear war, Cherednichenko asserted that “limited nuclear war can occur as a result of escalation from conventional war when the necessity may arise for the use of nuclear weapons against military targets on the battlefield.”⁴⁵

Cherednichenko went on to speak of a tactical nuclear conflict, possibly held to a limited region, in which the sides would use “mainly tactical nuclear weapons—missiles, aircraft, and naval-delivered weapons of small or medium (up to 600 kiloton) destructive power, employed to an operational depth of 300-500 kilometers against military targets.”⁴⁶ Yet he also emphasized the inherent difficulties both in limiting damage and civilian casualties while waging a nuclear war within a given region and in avoiding escalation to the use of strategic nuclear weapons. “There is no guarantee that an aggressor suffering setbacks would not turn to more powerful means, to strategic nuclear weapons,” Cherednichenko concluded, and thus, in a nuclear conflict, there would “unavoidably be enormous devastation and high population losses.”⁴⁷

The highest political level provided a very different kind of evidence regarding apparent Soviet interest during the early 1970s in limiting a possible nuclear conflict to Europe while deliberately eschewing nuclear strikes against the homelands of the Soviet Union and the United States. During arms control negotiations between U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev in summer 1972, Brezhnev is said to have proposed a U.S.-Soviet agreement to this effect. Kissinger reports that the United States, convinced that even the discussion of this idea, let alone a formal agreement, could grievously harm U.S. relations with its NATO allies, intentionally failed to respond to or follow up Brezhnev’s suggestion.⁴⁸

During the same period, a few Soviet military writers provided direct support for Western speculation that even in the midst of large-scale nuclear operations the Soviet Union might be contemplating the possibility of avoiding strikes against enemy urban-industrial concentrations in the anticipation that they would eventually capture and exploit

⁴⁵Maj. Gen. M. Cherednichenko, “Some Characteristics of Contemporary Military Art,” *VM*, No. 2, February 1970, p. 40, cited in Raymond L. Garthoff, “Continuity and Changes in Soviet Military Doctrine since the 1960s,” paper delivered at the Conference on the Dynamics of Soviet Defense Policy, Washington, D.C., September 21-23, 1987, p. 58.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸Henry A. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, Little, Brown & Co., Boston, 1982, p. 277.

these areas. Colonel M. F. Shirokov, for example, wrote regarding the “possibilities for acquiring local resources” during a destructive modern war:

For this purpose, it is very important to determine which targets and enemy regions should be left intact or rapidly reconstructed and used in the interests of strengthening the economic potential of our country and for supplying the troops.⁴⁹

All in all, these comments, the majority of which appeared in the General Staff’s limited-circulation monthly, *Military Thought*, indicate that by the end of the 1960s the Soviets had come to admit the possibility of their becoming involved in and likely plans for a limited nuclear war in adjacent theaters. The number and character of the limited nuclear strikes that they had in mind was by no means clear.

The Soviet concept may have involved responding to a highly limited NATO battlefield nuclear strike with a relatively small number of tactical nuclear strikes of their own. Or it may have involved larger-scale strikes carried out by a variety of forward-based tactical and operational delivery systems. Whatever the scale of limitation, the Soviets appeared to view such a limited conflict as nothing more than a brief transitory stage en route to an all-out nuclear war.

In addition to the direct comments and proposals regarding limited nuclear warfare reviewed above, during the late 1960s and early 1970s some Soviet military writers spoke of conducting military operations in terms consistent with the logic of a limited nuclear conflict. Among the most suggestive of these Soviet observations, which have been cited by several Western specialists as evidence of growing Soviet interest in the possibility of conducting limited nuclear warfare, are the following:

The decision to employ such devastating implements as nuclear weapons has become the exclusive prerogative of the political leadership. It is primarily the political, not the military leaders who determine the necessity of employing mass destruction weapons, who specify the principal targets and when they are to be hit.⁵⁰

⁴⁹Col. M. F. Shirokov, “Military Geography of the Present Stage,” *VM*, No. 11, 1966, in Douglass and Hoerber (eds.), *Selected Readings*, Part 1, p. 136.

⁵⁰Col. M. P. Skirido, *Narod, armiya, polkovodets* (The People, the Army, the Commander), Voenizdat, Moscow, 1970, translated and published under the auspices of the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1978, p. 97.

During war, military doctrine withdraws somewhat into the background because in armed conflict they [political leaders] are guided primarily by military-political considerations and by the conclusions and generalizations which follow from the conditions of the specific situation. Consequently, war and armed conflict are guided not by doctrine but by strategy.⁵¹

Politics determines the priority and the strength of blows inflicted on the enemy . . . politics must determine the speed and intensity of military actions. In doing so politics takes account not only of the aims of the war but also those of postwar settlement and subordinates the conduct of war to the attainment of these aims.⁵²

These quotes, taken together, reflect the fact that, in the last analysis, if war occurs the Soviet political leadership will have the ultimate authority to conduct the war as it sees fit, albeit within the constraints imposed by existing procedures, plans, and capabilities. The statements also make clear that the leadership's direction of military operations is likely to be shaped importantly by the unfolding wartime situation and by the objectives they choose to pursue for the postwar period. These views suggest that the Soviet leadership might elect to employ a strategy of measured wartime application of force to include the controlled execution of nuclear strikes against selected targets.

If this logic is to guide the most fundamental patterns of Soviet nuclear war-fighting, however, it will have to overcome the strong predilections in Soviet military doctrine for prompt, large-scale attacks launched at the outset of nuclear conflict with the purpose of quickly destroying the enemy's capability and will to resist. For just as some Soviet authors logically support the possible conduct of highly limited nuclear war, many others counsel otherwise. Thus, Marshal M. V. Zakharov, the chief of the powerful Soviet General Staff, discussing the development of Soviet military science in *Military Thought* in February 1968, stated:

As we know, prenuclear strategy had to be content with gradualness in its actions and with the accumulation of tactical and operational results. . . . Nuclear strategy demands otherwise: Only maximum concentration of force in the first strike (or strikes) can crush the enemy.⁵³

⁵¹Maj. Gen. S. N. Kozlov, *Spravochnik ofitsera* (The Officer's Handbook), Voenizdat, Moscow, 1971, translated and published under the auspices of the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1977, p. 65.

⁵²Col. B. Beley et al., *Marxism-Leninism on War and the Army*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1972, published under the auspices of the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1974, p. 17.

⁵³Marshal M. V. Zakharov, "Soviet Military Science over Fifty Years," *VM*, No. 2, 1968.

Colonel A. A. Sidorenko in 1970 provided a second expression of the imperative to use nuclear weapons promptly and in numbers sufficient to the task of successfully neutralizing the enemy's nuclear capabilities:

A delay in the destruction of the means of nuclear attack will permit the enemy to launch the nuclear strikes first and may lead to heavy losses and even to defeat of the offensive. The "accumulation" of such targets as nuclear weapons and waiting with the intention of destroying them subsequently is now absolutely inadmissible.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, even the military's doctrinal inclinations might well prove malleable. Witness the statement by Marshal (then Army General) V. G. Kulikov, who spoke in March 1973 of the need for not only "confidence and persistence but also the clear substantiation of decisions and frequently boldness in making the necessary amendments in a rapidly changing situation."⁵⁵

Kulikov's statement suggests that the Soviet leadership might be prepared to introduce variations in nuclear employment in the midst of a war—variations that go beyond Soviet prewar plans and predispositions. Moreover, at the end of the 1965-1974 period, Defense Secretary Schlesinger asserted, as previously noted, that Soviet exercises had revealed a greater interest in concepts of limited nuclear employment than was evident in Soviet doctrinal writings.⁵⁶

Detailed Soviet discussions of U.S. concepts for limited nuclear warfare also continued to appear throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s. The collective military authors of *Military Strategy* repeated their condemnations of the U.S. flexible response strategy in the third edition of this classic work, which was published in 1968.⁵⁷

⁵⁴Sidorenko, *The Offensive*, p. 134.

⁵⁵Kulikov, "High Combat Readiness—The Most Important Condition for the Reliable Defense of the Motherland," *KVS*, No. 6, March 1973, p. 20, cited in Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Selective Nuclear Operations and Soviet Strategy*, The RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif., P-5506, September 1975, p. 19.

⁵⁶See page 4, above.

⁵⁷Sokolovskiy (ed.) *Military Strategy*, 3d edition, H. F. Scott translation, pp. 62-69.

Also in 1968, civilian commentator Henry Trofimenko, after describing accurately and in great detail the evolution of U.S. theories on limited nuclear conflict from the mid-1950s onward, rejected these would-be American “rules of the game,” asserting that the Soviet Union’s conduct in war would be guided by its own Marxist-Leninist military doctrine.⁵⁸ Similarly, in 1971 Maj. Gen. A. K. Slobodenko, in describing the development of U.S. doctrines for limited nuclear war, pointed out the “great dangers” associated with any attempt to conduct a limited war in Europe.⁵⁹

A spate of Soviet criticism of U.S. military policy with regard to limited nuclear warfare appeared in 1974 following Defense Secretary James Schlesinger’s February announcement of the new U.S. targeting doctrine that came to bear his name. Several Soviet commentators, most of them civilian specialists on U.S. military and foreign policy, were heard from and all were uniformly negative regarding the possibility that nuclear war, particularly one waged with strategic nuclear forces, could be controlled.⁶⁰

The Soviets continued to increase their nuclear strike capabilities in the late 1960s and early 1970s. They made primary improvements in long-range strategic missiles, adding some 1300 third-generation silo-based ICBMs and deploying several hundred underwater-launched ballistic missiles carried on nuclear-powered submarines.⁶¹ To upgrade their regional strategic forces, they added over 200 variable-range ICBMs to cover targets in both the Far East and Europe and deactivated about 70 older MRBMs.⁶² To improve their

⁵⁸G. A. Trofimenko, *Strategiya global'noy voyny* (The Strategy of Global War), Mezhdunarodnyye otnosheniya Publishers, Moscow, 1968, p. 135.

⁵⁹Maj. Gen. A. K. Slobodenko, *Voyenno-strategicheskiye teorii imperializma i ikh kritika* (The Military-Strategic Theories of Imperialism and Their Critique), Znaniye, Moscow, 1971. Slobodenko, a long-time expert on Western military policies, currently teaches at the General Staff Academy; he was the coauthor, with Maj. Gen. M. A. Mil'shteyn, of two earlier major works on Western military concepts—*Voyennyye ideologii kapitalisticheskikh stran o kharaktere i sposobakh vedeniya sovremennoy voyny* (The Military Ideologies of the Capitalist Countries on the Character and Methods of Conducting Modern War), Znaniye, Moscow, 1957, and *O burzhuaznoy voyennoy nauke* (On Bourgeois Military Science), Voenizdat, Moscow, 1961.

⁶⁰These commentaries included M. Mil'shteyn and L. Semeyko, “The Problem of the Inadmissibility of a Nuclear Conflict: On New Approaches in the United States,” *SShA: Ekonomika, politika, ideologiya* (USA: Economics, Politics, and Ideology), No. 11, 1974; L. Semeyko, “New Forms But the Same Essence as Before,” *KZ*, April 8, 1975, and A. Arbatov and G. Arbatov, “Schlesinger’s Ideas on Form and Content,” *Novoye vremya* (New Times), No. 30, July 25, 1975, pp. 18-20.

⁶¹This expansion reflected the deployment of some 288 SS-9s, 1000 SS-11s, and 60 SS-13 third-generation ICBMs. The naval deployments included some 528 SS-N-6 SLBMs on 33 Yankee-class nuclear-powered submarines and 108 longer-range SS-N-8 SLBMs on 12 Delta-class nuclear-powered submarines. *The Military Balance, 1974-1975*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 1974, p. 8.

⁶²Meyer, *Soviet Theater Nuclear Forces*, Part 2, pp. 17-18.

operational-tactical forces, they deployed new, more capable, dual-role fighter-bomber aircraft.⁶³ Improvements in the command, control, and intelligence capabilities that supported these improved delivery systems apparently accompanied the deployments.

1975-1988: CONVENTIONAL AND NUCLEAR THEATER CAPABILITY

Since 1975, we have seen little Soviet military writing dealing in any detail with war, nuclear or conventional, at the central strategic, that is, intercontinental level. The Soviets have written only a few books or articles discussing the conduct of operations against the enemy's deep strategic rear. The brief references in the *Soviet Military Encyclopedia*, the service periodicals, books such as Maj. Gen. M. M. Kir'yan's *Military-Technical Progress and the Armed Forces of the USSR*, Col. Gen. Gareyev's *M. V. Frunze—Military Theoretician*, and the lengthy discussions in the lecture notes from the Voroshilov Academy of the General Staff all indicate continued Soviet adherence to the standard scenario for global nuclear conflict.

Soviet military literature devotes far more space, however, to the operational art and tactics of theater war. These writings, as well as information made public by Western intelligence agencies, clearly indicate that the Soviets have developed comprehensive doctrinal concepts, new organizational arrangements—high commands of forces in regional theaters of military operations, operational maneuver groups, air armies of the Supreme High Command (VGK), air assault brigades, etc.—and improved force capabilities to conduct a large-scale theater offensive in Western Europe, waged solely with conventional weapons.⁶⁴

Such a campaign, the Soviets emphasize, would be fought under the constant threat of sudden escalation to large-scale nuclear use. This development was also reflected in a major Soviet training exercise, *Zapad-81*, held in September 1981, which appears to have been the first large-scale exercise that involved only conventional conflict without any simulated escalation to the nuclear level.⁶⁵

⁶³These aircraft included the Su-17 Fitter B, the Su-24 Fencer A, and the MiG-23 Flogger. Ibid., and Robert Berman, *Soviet Air Power in Transition*, The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 1978, pp. 27-34.

⁶⁴For comprehensive descriptions of this new "theater strategic operation" as applied to Central Europe, see Michael Sadykiewicz, *The Soviet-Warsaw Pact Western Theater of Military Operations: Organization and Missions*, The RAND Corporation, N-2596-AF, 1987, and Phillip A. Petersen and John G. Hines, *The Soviet Conventional Offensive in Europe*, Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), Washington, D.C., DDB-2622-4-83, 1983.

⁶⁵Arch Shero and Richard Oden, "Exercise *Zapad '81*," *Review of Soviet Ground Forces*, Defense Intelligence Agency, April 1982, pp. 7-8.

At the same time, Soviet military scientists have continued to discuss the conduct of theater nuclear war. Once the nuclear threshold is crossed, whether following a period of conventional war or at the outset of a conflict, the available evidence points toward Soviet intentions to conduct theater warfare in terms of “the mass delivery of nuclear strikes and by swift troop actions following these strikes.”⁶⁶ In sum, while the evidence regarding deep-strike operations that might be conducted beyond the frontal advances in contiguous theaters of military operations is sparse, an abundant literature on theater operations indicates that the Soviets have acquired a genuine dual capability for waging theater warfare with either conventional or nuclear means.

In contrast to the several discussions of limited nuclear war that appeared in the late 1960s and early 1970s cited above, Soviet doctrinal writings over the past 15 years give little evidence of continuing, let alone growing, Soviet interest in limiting nuclear weapons employment. Aside from discussions in the Voroshilov lecture notes dating from the first years of this period, Western analysts have largely failed to locate Soviet discussions suggestive of limited nuclear war of the type reviewed earlier.

Direct doctrinal discussions of Soviet preparedness to consider the possibility of limited nuclear conflict since the mid-1970s have been confined to a few cryptic references. Marshal Ogarkov, for example, observed in his 1979 article on “Military Strategy” in the *Soviet Military Encyclopedia*: “At the same time the possibility is recognized of conducting protracted military action with conventional weapons alone, and, in individual theaters of military operations, even with the limited use of nuclear weapons.”⁶⁷

In 1982, General M. M. Kir’yan, in a quotation that has been cited by those digging hard for evidence of Soviet interest in possible nuclear limitation, made no direct reference to nuclear employment at all but simply spoke more generally of the creation of a well-proportioned military organization “permitting the accomplishment of missions of any scale, in any conditions.”⁶⁸ A 1984 military textbook on tactical troop training by Col. Gen. V. A. Merimskiy called for Soviet preparations to meet a variety of contingencies because “the presence of nuclear weapons in the armies of the probable enemy does not exclude the

⁶⁶Maj. Gen. M. M. Kir’yan et al., *Voyenno-tekhnicheskiy progress i voorouzhennyye sily SSSR* (Military-Technical Progress and the Armed Forces of the USSR), Voenizdat, Moscow, 1982, p. 312.

⁶⁷Marshal N. V. Ogarkov, “Military Strategy,” *Sovetskaya voyennaya entsiklopediya* (Soviet Military Encyclopedia), Vol. VII, Voenizdat, Moscow, 1979, p. 563.

⁶⁸Kir’yan et al., p. 326.

conduct of combat operations with limited use of nuclear weapons or with the employment of only conventional weapons.”⁶⁹

Finally, a 1986 volume edited by Marshal of Artillery G. E. Peredel'skiy, reviewing the 600-year history of Russian and Soviet artillery, noted simply that in the nuclear age one “could not exclude the possibility of the conduct of combat operations without the use of nuclear weapons or with limitation in their employment.”⁷⁰

All in all, over the past decade the public Soviet references to the need to prepare for limited nuclear conflict have been so few and so general as to preclude any conclusions about the size and character of the limitations that the Soviets might have in mind. This dearth of evidence may be traced, at least in part, to the unavailability to Western scholars since the early 1970s, with a few exceptions, of the limited-circulation journal, *Military Thought*.⁷¹ Moreover, we have witnessed throughout the 1980s a marked upsurge in statements from senior Soviet political and military figures that expressly reject the possibility of limited nuclear conflict. These declarations, which stress the dangers associated with nuclear war, have obvious utility for Soviet public diplomacy directed at Western and Third World audiences.

The Voroshilov Academy Lectures

The most prominent, and only partial, exception to this pattern appears in the materials derived from lectures reportedly presented at the Voroshilov Academy of the General Staff in the mid-1970s. These lectures, which the Soviets almost certainly considered inaccessible to Western observers, include scattered references to the possibility that a limited nuclear war might be fought between socialism and capitalism in one or more theaters of military operations.

⁶⁹Col. Gen. V. A. Merimskiy, *Takticheskaya podgotovka motostrelkovykh i tankovykh podrazdeleniy* (Tactical Preparation of Motorized Rifle and Tank Subunits), Voenizdat, Moscow, 1984, p. 8.

⁷⁰Marshal G. E. Peredel'skiy (ed.), *Otechestvennaya artilleriya 600 let* (600 Years of the Fatherland's Artillery), Voenizdat, Moscow, 1986, p. 329.

⁷¹Scattered references to *Military Thought* articles published since 1973, which are not accessible to the scholarly community as a whole, are found, for example, in a citation to a November 1980 issue of *VM* in Notra Trulock and Phillip Petersen, “Soviet Views and Policies Toward Theater War in Europe,” unpublished conference paper, September 1987. More recently, Raymond Garthoff cited several articles from issues of *VM* published in 1986 and 1987 in “New Thinking in Soviet Military Doctrine,” *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 1988, pp. 131-158.

One lecturer stated that “a war between a number of capitalist and socialist nations can be initiated with the use of conventional weapons, only to later develop into war with the limited employment of nuclear weapons.”⁷² According to a second lecturer, “political reasons may affect the selection of areas within a theater of military operations, the selection of countries to be hit by nuclear strikes, or of nations not to be attacked or to be attacked temporarily by nuclear weapons.”⁷³

A third lecturer described various scenarios in which the imperialists might start a war. He identified two cases of limited initial use of nuclear weapons by the enemy: the first growing out of an unsuccessful conventional war and the second involving limited nuclear strikes from the outset to compensate for weaknesses in the enemy’s conventional forces in a particular theater. Such limitations, he asserted, would prove transitory.

In case of limited surprise strikes by the enemy, the Soviet forces should rapidly launch strikes to destroy the enemy’s opposing groupings of forces, primarily his operational and tactical nuclear delivery means, and subsequently would move into the attack. . . . Conducting military actions with the limited use of nuclear weapons in Europe and other vital areas would not last long and the employment of all nuclear weapons similar to the initial [massed] nuclear strikes would soon be initiated.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, the lecturer suggested that an appropriate Soviet response to limited enemy nuclear use in Europe could involve a coordinated, possibly preemptive, strike carried out by those delivery systems based forward in the theater without involving the use of the regional strategic, ballistic missiles or bombers based in the USSR.

Depending on the situation, the employment of nuclear weapons by the enemy should be foiled through the launching by operational and tactical nuclear delivery means, air force operations, and conventional weapons strikes, and the rapid development of the attack to destroy the enemy and seize his vital strategic areas.⁷⁵

⁷²“Operational Art,” in J. Sloan, D. G. Wardak, and A. Jelali, *Lecture Materials from the Voroshilov Academy*, p. 16, National Defense University Press, forthcoming.

⁷³“Strategic Operations in a Continental TVD,” *ibid.*, p. 9.

⁷⁴“Principles of Strategic Action of the Armed Forces,” *ibid.*, p. 13.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

This initial strike would be directed against a series of key enemy targets, including his means of nuclear delivery, nuclear storage sites, air bases, critical air-defense elements, major ground force formations, and command and control systems.⁷⁶ Consequently, in a war fought in Central Europe, such a strike would likely involve hundreds of weapons delivered by tactical and operational surface-to-surface missiles and fighter-bombers aimed against several hundred critical NATO targets.⁷⁷

Thus, the Voroshilov Academy lecture materials dating from the mid-1970s appear to provide important evidence of further Soviet thinking about limited nuclear warfare. In this case, the limits follow the logic of Leonid Brezhnev's reported proposal to Henry Kissinger in 1972: That is, by deliberately avoiding the use of nuclear delivery systems based in the Soviet Union, the Soviets would hope to persuade the United States that even during a large-scale nuclear war the conflict might be confined to Europe without spreading to the homelands of the superpowers. Nevertheless, the opening Soviet salvo would likely involve strikes by hundreds of theater-based missiles and fighter-bombers.

The Voroshilov Academy lecture materials, one must also note, devote by far the most attention to the discussion of massed Soviet nuclear strikes in nearby theaters of military operations and against the overseas territory of the enemy. These massed strikes would involve employing not simply systems based in the theater but a combination of these systems and strategic missiles and bombers based on Soviet territory.

The Voroshilov lectures emphasize the desirability of the nearly simultaneous launch of both the theater-based nuclear delivery means assigned to the fronts and those of the strategic nuclear forces, that is, the strategic missiles of the SRF, the Navy's SSBNs, and the bombers of Long-Range Aviation, in a single, large-scale initial nuclear strike. Moreover, these lectures repeatedly state that the first launches in the initial massed nuclear strike in the theater are likely to be executed by the highly combat-ready regional strategic nuclear forces based in the USSR. They are to be followed as closely as possible by the launch of the operational and tactical delivery systems controlled by the Soviet ground forces located in Eastern Europe.⁷⁸

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 17.

⁷⁷Stephen Meyer has estimated that the target set associated with NATO's theater nuclear strike capabilities would run to approximately 275 installations. The addition of air-defense elements and major troop concentrations would readily expand this set of targets to 350 or so. Stephen M. Meyer, *Soviet Theater Nuclear Forces, Part 2: Capabilities and Implications*, p. 24.

⁷⁸"The Principles of Strategic Action of the Armed Forces," "Strategic Operations in a Continental TVD," "Operational Art," and "Army Offensive Operations," passim, in Sloan et al., *Lecture Notes from the Voroshilov Academy*.

Rejection of Limited War

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the public declarations of top Soviet civilian and military leaders consistently rejected the possibility of a limited nuclear war. In the context of the Soviets' determined opposition to NATO's plans to deploy the new U.S. medium-range Pershing II ballistic missiles and ground-launched cruise missiles in Western Europe, senior Soviet leaders and political commentators repeatedly condemned the concept of limited nuclear war.

The late General Secretary L. I. Brezhnev, the late Defense Minister D. F. Ustinov, and the former chief of the General Staff, Marshal N. V. Ogarkov all lent their voices to a sustained campaign that accused the United States of seeking to place itself in a position to initiate a nuclear conflict confined to Europe and categorically rejected this possibility.⁷⁹ Marshal Ustinov epitomized their position when he wrote in March 1982:

There can be no "limited" nuclear war. This, as Comrade L. I. Brezhnev stressed at the Twenty Sixth Congress of the CPSU, is an outright attempt to deceive peoples. If United States imperialism unleashes a nuclear war in Europe, for example, such a war would, at the very outset, lead to irreplaceable losses and the most disastrous consequences for the countries situated there and to the annihilation of entire peoples and their civilization which has been in existence for many centuries. In addition it would inevitably and irreversibly assume a worldwide character. This is why the calculations of those who hope to ignite a nuclear fire and limit it to the territory of the European continent, to make their allies the target of a devastating retaliatory strike while themselves remaining at a safe distance from the flame, are both cynical and illusory.⁸⁰

⁷⁹Brezhnev stated in an interview with *Der Spiegel* in November 1981, for example, "there can be no limited nuclear wars of any sort whatsoever." Any wars in which nuclear weapons were employed, he said, would "inevitably" take on a "world-wide character." See "L. I. Brezhnev Replies to Questions from the Editor of the West German Journal *Der Spiegel*," *Pravda*, November 3, 1981. Ustinov also ridiculed the concept of limited nuclear war, asserting that "only completely irresponsible people can claim nuclear war can be waged in accordance with some prearranged rules according to which nuclear missiles are to explode in a 'gentlemanly fashion' on specific targets without hitting population in the process." Marshal D. F. Ustinov, "Against the Arms Race and the Threat of War," *Pravda*, July 25, 1981. Ogarkov's statements included the following: "In a new war . . . it will not be possible to confine military operations within some limited framework, as Washington strategists advertise. The war will inevitably embrace the entire territories of the belligerents and it will be difficult to distinguish the front from the rear." Marshal N. V. Ogarkov, "The Victory and the Present Day," *Izvestiya*, May 9, 1983. See also Ogarkov's *Vsegda v gotovnosti k zashchite Otechestva* (Always in Readiness to Defend the Homeland), Voenizdat, Moscow, 1982, p. 16, and his interview with Leslie Gelb, "Soviet Marshal Warns US on Its Missiles," *New York Times*, March 17, 1983.

⁸⁰Marshal D. F. Ustinov, *Sluzhim Rodine, delu kommunizma* (We Serve the Fatherland and the Cause of Communism), Voenizdat, Moscow, 1982, p. 49.

Since Mikhail Gorbachev became general secretary of the Soviet communist party, the heavy emphasis on the suicidal dangers of nuclear war has similarly discouraged any public endorsement in the Soviet Union of the possibility that a nuclear war, once begun, might be limited. Soviet political leaders, civilian commentators, and military spokesmen have stressed the catastrophic consequences of any form of nuclear warfare in support of Gorbachev's call for drastic cuts in nuclear arms and the abolition of nuclear weapons throughout the world by the year 2000.

From the latter 1970s and to the present, Soviet military and civilian specialists on Western military policy have also produced a flood of books and articles tracing and critiquing perceived U.S. doctrinal developments regarding nuclear employment.⁸¹ During this time, successive U.S. administrations made a number of revisions to U.S. declaratory doctrine, particularly in the area of concepts and capabilities for waging central strategic nuclear war, that is, wars involving strikes on the U.S. and Soviet homelands.

First came the Schlesinger "retargeting doctrine" under President Nixon; Harold Brown's "countervailing strategy" and Presidential Directive followed in the Carter administration. Finally came what the Soviets have called the "direct confrontation" strategy of the Reagan administration, which they said included nuclear "warning shots" in Europe, protracted nuclear conflict, and the U.S. "prevailing" in a nuclear war.

⁸¹Among the most useful of these are G. A. Trofimenko, *SShA: Politika, voyna, ideologiya* (USA: Politics, War, and Ideology), Mysl' Publishers, Moscow, 1976; R. G. Bogdanov, M. A. Mil'shteyn, and L. S. Semeyko (eds.), *SShA: Voyenno-strategicheskiye kontseptsii* (USA: Military-Strategic Concepts), Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 1980; A. Arbatov, *Bezopasnost' v yadernyy vek i politika Vashingtona* (Security in the Nuclear Age and the Policy of Washington), Politizdat, Moscow, 1980; A. Arbatov, "The Strategy of Nuclear Madness," *Kommunist*, No. 6, April 1981, pp. 102-111; L. Semeyko, "Washington's Nuclear Tightrope," *KZ*, October 30, 1981; G. Trofimenko, "The Strategy of 'Direct Confrontation': Washington Is Seeking Superiority," *KZ*, June 2, 1981; Maj. Gen. R. Simonyan, "The Strategy of Global Aggression," *Novoye vremya* (New Times), No. 21, May 21, 1982, pp. 18-20; Maj. Gen. V. Larionov, "Scenarios for Unlimited Madness," *KZ*, July 16, 1982; Maj. Gen. R. Simonyan, "Washington's Aggressive Strategy: Types of War in the Pentagon's Interpretation," *KZ*, September 27, 1982; Col. M. Ponomarev, "Against the Strategy of Nuclear Catastrophe," *KZ*, January 30, 1983; L. Semeyko, "In Pursuit of Superiority: The Dangerous Nature of the Development of U.S. Military Doctrine," *KZ*, August 5, 1983; Genrikh Trofimenko, *The U.S. Military Doctrine*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1986.

In addition, first the Carter and then the Reagan administrations have embarked upon ambitious strategic force modernization efforts, including the MX ICBM, the Trident submarine and associated SLBMs, the sea-launched cruise missile, the B-1 bomber, and the air-launched cruise missile programs, as well as the controversial Pershing II and ground-launched cruise missile theater nuclear deployments, noted earlier. To this, the Reagan administration has added the ambitious Strategic Defense Initiative as a means to acquire a highly effective ballistic missile defense.

Soviet commentaries on U.S. nuclear doctrine and the strategic weapons programs provide generally accurate descriptions of these developments. Soviet spokesmen routinely attribute the blackest motives to the United States, including the purported attempt to gain strategic superiority so as to coerce the Soviet Union and perhaps even to permit Washington to launch an all-out disarming first strike. And, of course, they have decried the dangers of war associated with these initiatives. Moreover, they continue to challenge the fundamental American assumption that a nuclear war could be successfully limited.⁸²

Henry Trofimenko succinctly captured the differing U.S. and Soviet military doctrines on limited nuclear war when he concluded a lengthy and highly critical review of U.S. flexible strategic targeting initiatives by observing:

Pentagon theorists fail to realize that even if things would go according to their "nuclear probe with main forces," then the Soviet Union would act not in accordance with American "rules" designed to maximize the marginal advantages of the United States but rather according to its own military doctrine, "with the objective of full defeat for an aggressor who attempts to encroach on the Socialist fatherland."⁸³

It appears extremely unlikely that these generally accurate Soviet descriptions of the broad contours of U.S. strategic policy regarding the possible levels of modern conflict are being used, as James McConnell claims, as surrogates to discuss developments taking place in Soviet strategic thinking.⁸⁴ In its most simplified form, McConnell's methodological

⁸²See Simonyan, "The Strategy of Global Aggression," *Novoye vremya*, No. 21, May 21, 1982; Larionov, "Scenarios for Unlimited Madness," *KZ*, July 16, 1982, and L. Semeyko, Radio Moscow, January 22, 1984, in Federal Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report, Soviet Union*, FBIS-SOV-84-016, 24 January 1984.

⁸³G. H. Trofimenko, *USA: Politics, War, and Ideology*, p. 323. Interestingly, Trofimenko's description of Soviet doctrine was footnoted to Defense Minister Marshal A. A. Grechko's *The Armed Forces of the Soviet State*.

⁸⁴McConnell, *The Soviet Shift in Emphasis from Nuclear to Conventional*, Vol. II, pp. 18-20.

approach would appear to equate detailed Soviet discussion of a U.S. or NATO doctrinal concept with Soviet adoption of the concept in question.

Because the Soviets have been describing various Western doctrines in considerable detail since the mid-1950s, McConnell's approach would imply that their strategic thinking has been a mirror image of U.S. thinking throughout the period. This is obviously wrong. In a variant of this approach, McConnell sometimes focuses on Soviet descriptions of U.S. concepts that appear to misinterpret the U.S. concept or are simply fabrications that bear no resemblance to actual U.S. views or practices. He views these concepts, falsely attributed to the West, as reflections of the Soviets' own thinking. McConnell's approach has potential merit, *if* one can establish that the Soviet version of a U.S. concept is, in fact, incorrect, and that, if so, it does not simply represent a Soviet misinterpretation of what are often subtle, complex matters.

McConnell's conclusion regarding Henry Trofimenko's "reinterpretation" of the Schlesinger retargeting policy is a case in point. According to McConnell, Trofimenko misconstrued the Schlesinger policy as indicating that the United States was considering the possibility of employing ICBMs against Soviet forces deployed in forward theaters. McConnell thus concludes that Trofimenko's interpretation indicates that the Soviets actually have adopted such a policy for the potential theater application of their own central strategic forces.⁸⁵

I disagree with McConnell. First, the Schlesinger doctrine, as elaborated by Defense Secretary Schlesinger himself and other official spokesmen at the time, did in fact include this possibility and was expressly criticized for this by American observers.⁸⁶ Second, as noted above, the potential Soviet use of the "variable-range" SS-11 ICBM to attack targets in the European or Asian theaters had been recognized in the West since the late 1960s.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶See *Report of the Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger, Annual Defense Department Report FY 1975*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., March 4, 1974, p. 42; statements of former Defense Secretary Schlesinger and former Deputy Assistant Defense Secretary William Beecher, in February and July 1974, cited in Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Selective Nuclear Options in American and Soviet Policy*, The RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, Calif., R-2034-DDRE, December 1976, pp. 26-27; Ted Greenwood and Michael Nacht, "The New Nuclear Debate: Sense or Nonsense?" *Foreign Affairs*, July 1974, reprinted in J. E. Endicott and R. W. Stafford, Jr. (eds.), *American Defense Policy*, 4th ed., Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore, 1977, p. 90.

Doctrine of Defense and Reasonable Sufficiency

Over the past decade, Soviet political and military leaders have emphasized the idea that the Soviet Union is committed to a defensive military doctrine that threatens no one. Beginning with a major Brezhnev speech in Tula in 1977, the Soviets have been engaged in a sustained public campaign to portray themselves as staunchly committed to peace and opposed to nuclear war.⁸⁷ While these themes are by no means new, the recent Soviet effort in this regard has been unprecedented in its scope, persistence, and intensity.

The key aspects of this campaign to emphasize the Soviet Union's defensive posture have included:

- A unilateral Soviet pledge not to be the first to use nuclear weapons
- Strong support of peace movements opposing U.S. arms programs, in particular, the deployments of the neutron bomb, the Pershing II, and ground-launched cruise missiles in Western Europe
- Active sponsorship of several increasingly ambitious arms control proposals put forward in various bilateral and multilateral arms control negotiations.

The campaign has also featured repeated declarations by political and military figures regarding the peaceful intentions of the Soviet Union, the purely "defensive" character of Soviet and Warsaw Pact military doctrine,⁸⁸ the Soviet commitment to maintain the existing

⁸⁷L. I. Brezhnev, "Outstanding Exploits of the Heroes of Tula," *Pravda*, January 19, 1977.

⁸⁸Soviet claims that their military doctrine is not "offensive" or "aggressive" are not new. An article by Maj. Gen. I. Zavyalov, "An Answer to Opponents," in *VM*, No. 10, 1965, pp. 49-56, went to considerable length to make clear that Soviet doctrine is not and cannot ever be "aggressive," as the Soviet Union threatens no one. He also emphasized that Soviet doctrine called for the immediate commencement of the most active offensive operations in response to any aggression against the USSR. Interestingly, in the early 1980s Marshals Ustinov and Ogarkov again made this same point, namely, that the "defensive" orientation of military doctrine does not preclude the Soviet Armed Forces from undertaking vigorous and resolute offensive actions in response to any attack. Marshal D. F. Ustinov, "Historic Exploit," *Kommunist*, No. 16, November 1982, p. 27; Marshal N. V. Ogarkov, "Guarding Peaceful Labor," *Kommunist*, No. 10, July 1981, p. 85. The campaign to characterize Warsaw Pact doctrine as strictly defensive is even more recent, dating from a declaration issued by the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Pact after a meeting in Berlin in May 1987. See "On the Military Doctrine of the Warsaw Pact Member States," *Pravda*, May 31, 1987, pp. 1-2. It too has been accompanied by assertions by senior military figures that this defensive orientation does not preclude vigorous counteroffensive operations following successful repulsion of the enemy's initial attack. See Army General D. T. Yazov, *Na strazhe sotsializma i mir* (On Guard over Socialism and Peace), Voenizdat, Moscow, 1987, p. 33, and Army General A. I. Gribkov, "Doctrine of Maintaining Peace," *KZ*, September 30, 1988.

“approximate parity” and not to seek superiority in the strategic and theater nuclear balances, the absence of any Soviet plans for a preemptive first strike, and the mutually suicidal character of nuclear war.⁸⁹

Since 1987, we have seen a spate of Soviet commentaries, including major speeches by Mikhail Gorbachev, about the Soviet aspiration to achieve a state of “reasonable sufficiency” in defense.⁹⁰ With regard to nuclear weapons, the sufficiency objective has been defined as an effort to maintain nuclear parity between the superpowers while making deep reductions which are said to be aimed ultimately at the complete elimination of nuclear weapons throughout the world.

The parity concept has been discussed in both quantitative and qualitative terms. From a quantitative standpoint it has been identified as a rough equivalence in nuclear weapons and launchers. In qualitative terms it has been associated with the fact that both the Soviet Union and the United States possess the capability to inflict “unacceptable” retaliatory damage on the other, even after being subjected to a would-be disarming first strike.

Some Soviet civilian academics have gone so far as to suggest that adoption of this qualitative parity criterion could free the Soviet Union of the need to pursue symmetrical responses to U.S. arms programs, apparently permitting it to settle for less than numerical parity in the strategic nuclear and theater military balances. This, they assert, would allow the Soviets to avoid excessive military spending while still preserving a “sufficient” deterrent against possible American aggression.⁹¹

⁸⁹Key themes from the post-Tula line continue to appear regularly in the speeches and articles of Politburo members, military spokesmen, and political commentators. One of its most thorough elaborations is found in *The Threat to Europe*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1981, passim. This pamphlet and subsequent annual updates to it, published in Russian, English, and other European languages, although attributed to the Soviet Committee for European Security and Cooperation and the Scientific Research Council on Peace and Disarmament, were reportedly written by specialists on U.S. defense and foreign policy matters at Arbatov’s USA Institute.

⁹⁰See M. S. Gorbachev, “Perestroika—A Vital Matter. Speech to 18th Congress of USSR Trade Unions,” *Pravda*, February 26, 1987, pp. 1-2; M. S. Gorbachev, “The Reality and Guarantees of a Secure World,” *Pravda*, September 17, 1987, pp. 1-2; Ye. Primakov, “New Philosophy of Foreign Policy,” *Pravda*, July 9, 1987; Army General D. T. Yazov, “The Military Doctrine of the Warsaw Pact Is the Doctrine of the Defense of Peace and Socialism,” *Pravda*, July 27, 1987, p. 5; and V. V. Zhurkin, S. A. Karaganov, and A. V. Kortunov, “On Reasonable Sufficiency,” *SShA: Ekonomika, politika, ideologiya*, No. 12, December 1987, pp. 11-21.

⁹¹This line of argument, made by Zhurkin, Karaganov, and Kortunov, op. cit., and I. Malashenko, “Parity Reassessed,” *New Times*, November 30, 1987, pp. 9-10, has been firmly rejected by Soviet military commentators on “defense sufficiency,” who consistently stress the requirement to maintain East-West military parity.

None of these discussions has dealt with the employment of nuclear weapons. The commentaries reject nuclear war-fighting considerations, echoing the now familiar refrain that any nuclear war would inevitably escalate to a general nuclear war that would destroy all involved. These efforts to portray Soviet defense aspirations in a most benign manner have been accompanied by accusations that certain circles in the United States continue to seek military superiority and the expansion of American influence at the expense of the Soviet Union.

Soviet military spokesmen, including Marshals Ustinov, Ogarkov, Kulikov, and Akhromeyev and Army General Yazov, have contributed prominently to the post-Tula and "sufficiency" campaigns. The adoption of this "post-Tula line" at the highest levels has precluded any dramatic forays by the military philosophers of the Main Political Administration (MPA) like those that occurred in the 1960s and early 1970s regarding either the winnability of nuclear war or the Soviet commitment to attaining military-technical superiority over the enemy. Instead, such prominent philosophers as Col. Gen. D. Volkogonov, Maj. Gen. A. S. Milovidov, and Col. Ye. Rybkin have been among those repeating the standard post-Tula litany, including the emphasis on the suicidal character of nuclear war and its unacceptability as an instrument of policy. Yet these same senior military and MPA spokesmen also stressed the idea that the Soviet Armed Forces must be strengthened and must continue to improve their combat readiness so as to restrain the United States.⁹²

Brezhnev's post-Tula line and the more recent "new political thinking" on security policy, as well as the "reasonable sufficiency" concept and the denuclearization campaign, all promoted by Gorbachev, have served several purposes. The primary motivation behind them appears to be a Soviet determination to portray itself as the superpower most seriously committed to avoiding nuclear war, halting the arms race, and supporting radical reductions in military forces, including the global abolition of nuclear weapons. This public posture in combination with the Soviet "no first use" of nuclear weapons pledge and its vigorous advancement of various arms control initiatives has proved useful in promoting Soviet foreign policy interests in the international arena.

⁹²A. S. Milovidov and E. A. Zhdanov, "Some Philosophical Questions of War and Peace," *Voprosy filosofii* (Problems of Philosophy), No. 10, 1980, pp. 32-51; Ye. Rybkin, I. Tyulin, and S. Kortunov, "Anatomy of a Bourgeois Myth," *Mirovaya ekonomika i mezhdunarodnyye otnosheniya* (World Economy and International Relations), No. 8, August 1982; Maj. Gen. A. Milovidov, "Taking into Account the Growing Military Danger," *KZ*, March 28, 1984; Col. Gen. D. Volkogonov, "Imperatives of the Nuclear Age," *KZ*, May 22, 1987.

From a narrower perspective, these public diplomacy campaigns have been launched and the more militant declarations of the professional military evident earlier have been toned down in an effort to counter charges that were gaining increasing currency in the West during the mid-1970s; namely, the charge that the Soviet Union was embarked upon a determined course to gain nuclear superiority and thus meet its doctrinal commitment to attaining a nuclear war-fighting, war-winning capability. Finally, the statements acknowledging the awesome destructiveness of a nuclear war undoubtedly also reflect an awareness among the Soviet political and military elite that such a war would pose exceptional dangers to the Soviet Union and most certainly should be avoided.⁹³

Continued Operational Buildup Under Gorbachev

In my view, this new public Soviet stance on the unacceptability of nuclear war has not, however, produced significant change in the "military-technical," that is, the operational dimension of Soviet military doctrine regarding these matters. The Soviet political leadership continues to call upon the Soviet Armed Forces not only to prevent war but also to prepare itself to fight such a war. And should such a war occur, the senior civilian leaders have almost certainly directed the military to prepare to use existing Soviet forces to win it.

The move to add a large-scale conventional variant for war in the European theater that may last weeks or even months rather than a few days, discussed above, has continued during this period. Heightened awareness of the destructiveness of nuclear war reflected in the antinuclear campaign most certainly reinforced the interest of the political and military leadership in developing this full-fledged conventional option.

Despite the publicity condemning nuclear warfare, Soviet military theorists have also continued to produce a steady stream of books and articles elaborating concepts for the conduct of nuclear strikes and the exploitation of these strikes, particularly at the tactical and operational levels.⁹⁴ In the last analysis, the addition of a theater conventional option of

⁹³For an interesting analysis of the differing emphases in statements on defense issues by various political and military figures in the late 1970s and early 1980s and a not-so-convincing argument that this commentary reveals a policy debate between "diplomacists" and "militarists," see Dan L. Strode and Rebecca V. Strode, "Diplomacy and Defense in Soviet National Security Policy," *International Security*, Fall 1983, pp. 91-116.

⁹⁴See Col. F. D. Sverdlov, *Takticheskiy manevr* (Tactical Maneuver), Voenizdat, Moscow, 1982, the series of articles that appeared in *Voyennyy vestnik* in 1982, beginning with Lt. Col. Yu. Chumakov's "Swiftness and Relentlessness of the Offensive," No. 1, 1983, pp. 22-26, as listed in Sec. I, fn 8, above, and Lt. Gen. V. G. Reznichenko, *Taktika* (Tactics), Voenizdat, Moscow, 1984.

indeterminate duration complicates and diversifies Soviet doctrine, but it has by no means led to an abandonment of Soviet efforts to perfect their plans and preparations for conducting nuclear war.

With regard to force capabilities, the Soviets have been engaged since 1975 in yet another dramatic surge of nuclear force expansion and modernization, as well as a major upgrade in capabilities for large-scale conventional war. The across-the-board improvements in Soviet intercontinental, theater strategic, and operational-tactical nuclear strike capabilities have been unprecedented in scope and character.

The nuclear warhead inventories for the intercontinental and regional strategic missile forces have increased by factors of three and two, respectively, as a result of the deployment of independently targeted multiple warheads on their fifth-generation ICBMs, fourth-generation SLBMs, and third-generation IRBMs.⁹⁵ These new missiles are also generally more accurate and more reliable. The accuracy improvements in the ICBMs have been sufficient to place at substantial risk the U.S. silo-based ICBM force. Moreover, the new Soviet strategic missiles are all deployed in more survivable basing configurations, including in superhard silos, in close-in "bastion" submarine patrol areas defended by Soviet antisubmarine warfare forces, and in a land-mobile mode.

Soviet regional strategic capabilities have been further improved with the deployment of over two hundred new intermediate-range Backfire bombers which carry an improved air-to-surface missile. In addition, a command and control network that is increasingly diverse, hardened, and redundant controls all of these more capable strike systems.⁹⁶

The Soviets have also begun deploying a new family of operational-tactical missiles to replace mid-1960s-vintage systems for the support of theater operations.⁹⁷ The new systems, which apparently can be used to carry nuclear, chemical, or improved conventional

⁹⁵These include 150 SS-17s, 308 SS-18s, and 360 SS-19 ICBMs, some 224 SS-N-18 SLBMs on 14 Delta III-class nuclear-powered submarines, 40 SS-N-20 SLBMs on two Typhoon-class submarines, and 378 SS-20 mobile IRBMs. *Soviet Military Power*, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1984, p. 18.

⁹⁶Desmond Ball, *Can Nuclear War Be Controlled?* Adelphi Papers, No. 169, International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 1981, pp. 43-45, and Stephen M. Meyer, "Soviet Nuclear Operations," in A. B. Carter et al. (eds.), *Managing Nuclear Operations*, The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 1987, pp. 470-531.

⁹⁷These are the SS-21 replacement for the short-range Frog-7 tactical missile, the SS-22 short-range ballistic missile replacing the SS-12, and the SS-23 operational missile that is replacing the Scud B. Warsaw Pact statements identified the deployment of all three missiles with Soviet forces in Eastern Europe as "countermeasures" undertaken in response to the NATO deployments of the Pershing II and GLCM begun in November 1983.

munitions, are all reported to have increased range, accuracy, and reliability. Finally, the air-delivery capabilities have also been increased significantly with regard to range, payload, and penetration capabilities, thanks to the continuing deployments of new ground-attack fighters and fighter-bombers.⁹⁸ This upgrade of operational-tactical missiles and fighter-bombers, all of which would likely be launched from forward locations in Eastern Europe, raises the possibility, for the first time, that the Soviets could conduct extensive nuclear operations against Western Europe without relying on their longer-range missiles and medium bombers based in the USSR. Thus, from a capabilities standpoint, the Kremlin may now have the option to wage nuclear war in Europe in a manner that could lessen the likelihood of Western retaliation against the Soviet homeland.

⁹⁸These include continuing deployments of the Su-24 Fencer A/C, the MiG-27 Flogger D/J, and the Su-17 Fitter D/H, *The Military Balance, 1983-1984*, p. 18. Moreover, the Soviets have also reorganized their frontal and Long-Range Aviation into four new air armies to allow more centralized direction of air power for theater war in Europe and in the Far East. Mark L. Urban, "Major Reorganization of Soviet Air Forces," *International Defense Review*, No. 6, 1983, p. 756.

IV. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Having reviewed the development of Soviet declaratory military doctrine, their commentary on U.S. concepts and the evolution of Soviet military capabilities over the past three decades, I am led to the following conclusions:

1. **Soviet doctrinal commentary indicates an interest in imposing some limitations on nuclear use for a variety of political and military reasons. Yet the Soviets, in the main, remain largely hostile to the idea that a nuclear war could be fought in a highly limited manner, that is, in the form of a series of small-scale nuclear exchanges carried out largely for bargaining purposes.**

Soviet rejection of the possibility of limited nuclear war almost certainly was motivated initially by their belief that the United States was promoting such concepts in an effort to gain increased coercive leverage from its superior nuclear capabilities. To prevent such coercion and deter any American resort to nuclear attack, the Soviets sought in the early to mid-1960s to project the image that any war between the Soviet Union and the United States would rapidly escalate to a global nuclear conflict and include large-scale strikes against military, economic, and political targets in the United States.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, as the Soviets moved to a position of nuclear parity and even advantage, particularly at the theater level in Europe, they began to consider the possibility of limited nuclear conflict in nearby theaters. Yet they appear to have continued to reject U.S. concepts of highly limited nuclear war. They have argued that these concepts are designed to facilitate the possible employment of American nuclear forces against Soviet forces in Europe and perhaps against targets in the USSR as well, while the United States itself would be spared from attack. They continue to seek to convince the United States that it cannot use its nuclear capabilities without running very high risks of triggering large-scale theater exchanges that would eventually culminate in a massive Soviet attack against the full range of military, political, and economic targets in the United States.

The Soviets were particularly adamant on this point in the early to mid-1980s in the context of their campaign against the U.S. Pershing II and GLCM deployments. Soviet spokesmen have repeatedly warned that the use of nuclear weapons in Europe, presumably

including strikes against targets in the USSR which, they assert, are the primary objectives of the U.S. intermediate-range nuclear force (INF) deployments, will trigger global war, including strikes against the United States.

The Soviets have also taken a strong stand against nuclear war in general and limited nuclear war, in particular, as a means to promote their “peace-loving” image on the world scene. They use this stance, in combination with Gorbachev’s increasingly ambitious arms control initiatives, with particular emphasis on the global elimination of nuclear weapons by the year 2000, to erode public support for Western defense efforts, to sow discord in NATO, and to promote the Soviet denuclearization campaign.

The Soviet rejection of limited nuclear war almost certainly also reflects real doubts, strongly reinforced by the basic thrust of Soviet military doctrine, that any nuclear conflict, once begun, could actually be controlled. Over the years, the Soviets have come to emphasize two basic thresholds in warfare: that between peace and war and that between a war fought with conventional weapons and one in which nuclear weapons are employed. Their willingness to contemplate and plan for a major conventional conflict between the superpowers and their respective coalition partners has emerged gradually over the past 20 years. They have not adopted this new variant as a realistic planning contingency, however, at the expense of their extensive preparations for nuclear war.

With regard to nuclear conflict, Soviet military doctrine continues to manifest a strong predisposition, once the nuclear threshold is crossed, to promptly employ massed nuclear strikes against military, economic, and political targets throughout the depth of NATO territory. This inclination is reinforced by the Soviet determination not to permit the enemy to execute what Stephen Meyer has called the “first decisive use” of nuclear weapons, a commitment that manifests itself in the strong Soviet interest in nuclear preemption.¹

As discussed earlier, the Soviet predilection for massed initial strikes in certain theaters does not mean that the Soviets would not employ their available arsenal selectively. Soviet doctrinal writings and analytic modeling literature indicate a strong interest in attacking enemy targets selectively so as to limit collateral damage and thereby facilitate follow-on combined-arms operations designed to destroy enemy military capabilities, to break his will to resist, and to pave the way for the occupation of his territory in contiguous theaters of military operations. As noted above, they are surely prepared to wage nuclear warfare in one theater while not mounting nuclear strikes in other regions.

¹Meyer, *Soviet Theater Nuclear Forces*, Part 1, p. 28.

The Soviets have also indicated an interest in the possibility of withholding nuclear attacks against industrial centers that they expect eventually to capture and utilize. Most notably, the Voroshilov lecture materials, the Cherednichenko article in *Military Thought* in 1970, and Brezhnev's proposal to Kissinger in 1972 regarding possible mutual superpower avoidance of attacks on their respective homelands in the event of a nuclear war in Europe all suggest that the Soviets might seek to limit their initial nuclear strike in Central Europe. They may be prepared to attack with a substantial number of operational and tactical delivery systems deployed forward in the theater against a wide range of key NATO military targets, instead of employing longer-range missiles or bombers based in the USSR.²

Soviet military doctrine, however, appears to ignore, or even reject, the idea of conducting small-scale nuclear attacks, highly limited in terms of the delivery systems employed and the targets or geographic areas struck, undertaken against a powerful foe for purposes of focused military effects, political symbolism, or tacit bargaining. The Soviets would almost certainly view such small strikes as highly provocative. Thus, they probably would not attack in this way, either on the battlefield or against the enemy's rear area. Soviet doctrinal writings show no interest, for example, in mounting highly limited nuclear strikes against the small number of air or naval ports of debarkation in Europe as a means to disrupt reinforcement operations from the United States.³

The Soviets' apparently low estimation of the utility of highly limited strikes could have an intriguing reverse side. It might foreshadow a willingness, in the midst of a successful Warsaw Pact conventional assault against NATO, to tolerate NATO's symbolic recourse to a few nuclear weapons as long as the Soviets remained convinced that these strikes posed no serious threat to their overall theater offensive. Faced with such symbolic attacks by Western forces, the Soviets could, of course, respond with a highly limited strike

²Such a strike would likely involve attacks on some few hundred installations, including nuclear weapons storage sites, missile garrisons, air bases, major command centers, air-defense installations, pre-positioned materiel depots, and ports of debarkation. A useful estimate of this target set, based, in part, on Stephen Meyer's pioneering analysis, is found in Dennis Gormley, "Emerging Attack Options in Soviet Theater Strategy," in Hoffman et al. (eds.), *Swords and Shields: NATO, the USSR, and New Choices for Long-Range Offense and Defense*, pp. 105-107.

³Notra Trulock, "Soviet Perspectives on Limited Nuclear War," in Hoffman et al. (eds.), *Swords and Shields*, p. 77, and Fred S. Hoffman, "Imperfect Strategies, Near-Perfect Defenses and the SDI," in *ibid.*, p. 204, suggest that the Soviets might consider using limited nuclear strikes against American ports of debarkation in Europe in a NATO-Warsaw Pact confrontation.

of their own. They would appear more likely, however, to elect to push on conventionally, without undertaking any nuclear response, while intensifying preparations for the execution of a theater-wide preemptive strike should NATO subsequently choose to launch a larger-scale, potentially decisive nuclear attack.

2. **Although they have repeatedly criticized U.S. strategies for limited nuclear war, the Soviets are well aware of the various concepts for limitation discussed in Western theoretical literature and purportedly embodied in U.S. and NATO military preparations.**

Over the years, Soviet military and civilian specialists on Western military policy have stayed abreast of U.S. thinking and planning in this area. They have written extensively and, for the most part, accurately on these matters, thus informing the Soviet political and military leadership about the various limitations that the West might seek to observe. Despite their long-standing preference for massed nuclear strikes, this awareness could provide a potentially important basis for the Soviets' joining in the reciprocal weapons employment restraint that would be required if a nuclear conflict were to be successfully limited.

3. **Given their large, diverse, and highly capable nuclear strike capabilities, supported by a highly centralized and generally resilient command and control system, the Soviets could—if they chose to—readily employ their nuclear attack forces with various self-imposed constraints.**

The Soviets have designed and deployed their nuclear strike capabilities to support a military doctrine that anticipates the conduct of a series of large-scale nuclear attacks to achieve maximum military, economic, and psychological effect. The Soviets would execute these attacks according to detailed strike plans and under strict centralized control, at least until a general nuclear release were granted.⁴ The resultant mix of attack forces and command and control arrangements provides considerable inherent capability for the tightly controlled execution of nuclear strikes in a much more limited manner. This does not mean,

⁴The Soviets appear to have developed command and control arrangements in which only the highest Soviet political leadership has the right to authorize the initial use of nuclear weapons. Following that initial nuclear release, however, the authority to execute follow-on strikes may well devolve to the selected senior military commanders in Moscow and in the various theaters. See Meyer, *Soviet Theater Nuclear Forces*, Part 2, pp. 27-29.

of course, that either the Soviet Union or the United States would likely be able to maintain close control of its nuclear forces if the opponent were determined to mount specially designed attacks to disrupt this control.⁵

4. **Despite their strong declaratory stands and doctrinal predilection for massed strikes, the Soviets might be prepared to undertake some limited nuclear operations designed to contain the conflict at less than an all-out, general nuclear war, as long as the Western nuclear powers were prepared to observe similar limits.**

The most likely candidate for such limitation from the Soviet point of view would be a nuclear war fought in Central Europe in which both the Soviet Union and the Western nuclear powers refrained from mounting nuclear strikes against each other's homelands. For this "decoupling" to occur, the Soviets would almost certainly have to be prepared to conduct their nuclear operations solely with operational and operational-tactical systems based in Eastern Europe, thus forgoing the use of their regional strategic IRBMs and medium bombers based in the western USSR. The United States would need to rely strictly on forward-based systems and, perhaps, SLBMs as well.

Even granting such reciprocal restraint, given the pressures and uncertainties that would accompany such a clash, the chances for containing such a conflict in Europe would appear quite slim. Of course, the specter of precisely this kind of limited nuclear war haunts many in Europe today.

From a capabilities standpoint, the Soviets could also carry out a second class of limited strikes that would fit with their doctrinal inclinations toward large-scale attacks designed for maximum military effect yet would involve an important departure from the all-out "counterforce plus countervalue" pattern of nuclear strikes often described in Soviet military writings. This option would involve "counterforce only" strikes against enemy military capabilities combined with intentional avoidance, to the maximum extent possible, of direct attacks or collateral damage against urban-industrial and political-administrative targets.

The residual threat posed by Soviet nuclear attack forces withheld from strikes on enemy cities would, in theory, suffice to deter the enemy from nuclear retaliation against Soviet cities. The Soviets might employ such a strategy either in contiguous theaters of

⁵See Ball, *Can Nuclear War Be Controlled?* passim.

war—Europe, the Far East (China, Japan, etc.)—or against the United States. A variant of this pattern could be the often-discussed Soviet large-scale yet “limited” attack designed to destroy the U.S. silo-based ICBM force and perhaps also the nonalert portions of U.S. strategic bomber and submarine bases, while seeking to hold down American civilian casualties to “only” several million.

As noted above, we find a few doctrinal references, most notably the Shirokov articles in *Military Thought* in 1966 and 1968, that reflect explicit Soviet interest in city-sparing, at least as applied to contiguous theaters of military operations in which the Soviets could expect to successfully capture and exploit the exempted areas.⁶ Several American specialists on Soviet military affairs have speculated that the Soviets might be prepared to follow such a “counterforce only” strategy either in strikes against Europe or against the United States.⁷ Yet even this limited, large-scale use strategy would pose serious difficulties for the Soviet political and military leadership.

The Soviets have written often of the immense difficulties in conceiving and executing a nuclear attack strategy that could meaningfully distinguish between the destruction of counterforce and countervalue targets. They have noted, in particular, the intermingling of the two target classes, the widespread destructive effects of nuclear weapons, and the difficulties that both sides would have in recognizing such limitations in the midst of a nuclear conflict. Moreover, to have any hope of sustaining reciprocal intrawar restraint, the Soviets presumably would have to forgo disruptive attacks against the command and control system supporting U.S. nuclear forces—attacks that constitute a strongly emphasized critical element of the Soviet countermilitary targeting doctrine. Finally, the implementation of such a policy would appear to make sense only if the Soviets had a reasonably high expectation that they would, in fact, succeed in destroying a major portion of the relevant U.S. nuclear delivery capabilities.

⁶See Col. M. F. Shirokov, “Military Geography at the Present Stage,” *VM*, No. 11, 1966, and “The Question of Influences on the Military and Economic Potentials of Warring States,” *VM*, No. 4, 1968.

⁷See Garthoff, *Soviet Strategy in the Nuclear Age*, pp. 73-75; Meyer, *Soviet Theater Nuclear Forces*, Part 1, p. 19; Lambeth, *Selective Nuclear Options in American and Soviet Strategic Policy*, p. 52, and Michael McGwire, “Soviet Naval Doctrine and Strategy,” in D. Leebaert (ed.), *Soviet Military Thinking*, George, Allen, and Unwin, London, 1981, pp. 131-132.

GLOSSARY

ICBM	intercontinental ballistic missile
INF	intermediate-range nuclear force
IRBM	intermediate-range ballistic missile
IUSAC	Institute of the Study of the United States and Canada
KVS	<i>Kommunist vooruzhennykh sil</i> (Communist of the Armed Forces)
KZ	<i>Krasnaya zvezda</i> (Red Star)
MiG	Mikoyan-Gurevich (fighter aircraft)
MPA	Main Political Administration of the Soviet Army and Navy
MRBM	medium-range ballistic missile
SLBM	sea-launched ballistic missile
SRF	Strategic Rocket Forces
SSBN	nuclear-powered ballistic-missile submarine
VGK	<i>Verkhovnoye glavnokomandovaniye</i> (Supreme High Command)
VIZh	<i>Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal</i> (Military History Journal)
VM	<i>Voyennaya mysl'</i> (Military Thought)

